SHIKSHA

MY EXPERIMENTS AS AN EDUCATION MINISTER

MANISH SISODIA

VISIT…

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My Experiments as an Education Minister

PENGUIN BOOKS

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SHIKSHA

The son of a government schoolteacher, Manish Sisodia, deputy chief minister and education minister of Delhi, is a senior leader of the Aam Aadmi Party and a member of the Political Affairs Committee. In the past, he was a journalist with Zee News and All India Radio, after which he was active in the struggle to get the Right to Information Act passed in Parliament and played a key role in laying the foundation of the Jan Lokpal Movement. His significant contribution to reforming the education system in Delhi has gained him the reputation as one of the best administrators and educationists in the country.

To all the proud teachers of Delhi government schools

Delhi, a Hope . . .

In Delhi, government schools have brought new hope in the education system by scoring a pass percentage of over 96 per cent this year. This is a great class 12 result. The fact that these are the best results in the last twenty-one years makes this an important landmark. What fills me with pride is that in today's date, there are many Delhi government schools that are preferred over private schools by parents for their wards. Another feather in our cap is that the admission fee of many big private schools has not increased in the last four years. This is because the government got the accounts of these schools checked and found that they had crores of funds lying in surplus. Education departments from all over the country are now keen to visit Delhi government schools to understand what exactly is happening in this city that has drawn such attention! Not just national but many international delegations are paying Delhi a visit just to understand its education model.

During the days of agitation, in 2010–11, Arvind Kejriwal and I would often wonder why education was not at the centre of politics. Why was it that governments never allotted the requisite amount of money in budgets? Why was education not on anyone's election agenda? In 2015, when Kejriwal was voted in as the chief minister by Delhi, with AAP getting sixty-seven out of seventy seats, it was our turn to answer these questions. We were now answerable to ourselves and the country's politics. As soon as he became the chief minister, Kejriwal made it clear to all ministers and officers that education was the topmost agenda of his government. After four and a half years since then, as I write the introduction to this book, I can say with a great deal of happiness that our government has changed the people's perception.

It is a fact that education has not been in focus in political discourse. The reason for this is that it isn't easy to focus on education while doing political work. There are two main reasons for this: One, we lack an organizational system in a big way. Usually, all education-related decisions are taken by the

system in a big way. Usually, all education-related decisions are taken by the education minister or the people in the education ministry or the education directorate. If we go by the prevailing norms, there is no need for them to have an experience in or understanding of education. Any person, whose party is in majority and who has been voted in, can become the education minister; any senior IAS officer can become a director or secretary of education. These three are the principal stewards of education, but neither at the Centre nor at the state level is it important for them to have some experience in or understanding of the sector. In my view, those who understand education do not necessarily have the authority to bring about a positive change, and the ones who take decisions mostly lack the understanding. This is one reason for the current dismal situation in India. The other reason, in my opinion, is that there is no instant gratification when it comes to improving education systems as the hard work yields results later. Today's politics wants instant results. The public expects quick solutions to issues from its government. In such a situation, it becomes easier to pacify them by constructing roads or flyovers, or to float policies such as pension schemes that make a bit of a difference to the lives of people. There has been a tradition to use popular schemes to woo voters but working on education doesn't just mean building a school. Improving education also means constantly supervising hundreds and thousands of teachers—to ensure that they spend more time in schools, that they attend training programmes, and to make them more accountable. These are enough to make anyone unpopular among teachers but without these, without their support, without putting them in 'mission mode', it is impossible to make any improvements in the education sector. This is probably the reason why previous ministers have not made education the focus of their agenda.

In the last four years, many of my well-wishers have commented that we have been doing great work in the sector of education and the country needs development in this arena the most, but we should also float schemes that will make our politics successful. By this they mean winning elections. The success or failure of politics is in future's womb but, for now, Delhi is proof that if there is political willingness, the country's growth vis-à-vis education is possible. The Delhi education model is testament to the fact that with extreme diligence and political willpower government schools can be made like private schools even at a time when their performance across the country is underwhelming. Delhi is

also an example of how with political interest and honest governance, the steeply rising fees in private schools can be regulated, which is a major source of concern for a lot of parents.

I am writing this book to document this story of transformation, so that people can appreciate these finer points which have been effective in helping the Delhi government change the face of government schools. It is also to familiarize them with the reason behind these efforts because just getting good results and building great structures do not translate to good education. Education is not merely about creating a society equipped with school and college certificates. Education is more than that, much more.

The purpose of education is not just to help people improve their earning capabilities or to contribute to the country's economic development. Education can also help raise the consciousness of the country and society. Research documents and books on education may have mentioned some of these intentions, but today, in practice, the aim of the education that we are giving to our next generation through schools, colleges, libraries, laboratories and exams doesn't seem to be the same. The worldview and society that we seem to be talking about at national and international forums and the one that we are trying to build with our alliances, compromises and laws, etc.—in none of these is there a stress on putting education to use as a potential tool. In all conferences and seminars on education around the world, there is a definite focus that no child in any country should be left behind. A lot of effort is also being made towards this. There are various programmes, such as 'no child left behind'; Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (education for all); and to get every child on earth to school. These are good and important projects. The question of the hour though is, what will we give these children after getting them to school? Education? On what? What kind? To what end? The attempt is to teach the child everything, from grammar to science, so that he/she can find employment, so that he/she can live respectfully. A lot of effort is put into getting a child admitted to a good school. But there is no stress on ensuring that the child does not participate in any kind of violence, does not contribute to pollution, does not spread hatred, does not spread corruption. Good grammar is assured but not courteous conduct.

Today, we see civilizational problems such as terrorism, violence, hatred, rampant greed and pollution all around us. The society's understanding of the solution is that with the spread of education, there will emerge well-educated

solution is that with the spread of education, there will emerge well-educated people who as officers or administrators will create strict laws and execute them to root out crime. They will end violence, fill people with compassion, put a stop to rape and exploitation and find solutions for issues such as pollution. If that's how we think, we think wrong, but unfortunately, for now, that's how we think. That is the bitter truth.

All countries in the world wish to prosper. They desire a certain kind of order, societal or otherwise. However, hardly any countries are utilizing their education systems to achieve it. Everyone wants to utilize the skills of an educated human being, but the utilization of education has not been understood by many yet, and there is a big difference between the two. We need to create educated people who can become resources and not officers or administrators.

This isn't the first time that we are discussing education. Many educationists have worked with institutions and governments in the past. We are just a four-and-half-year-old government. We did not start AIIMS or IITs or IIMs in India. There are many good educational institutions in the country: from Delhi University to Banaras Hindu University. There are thousands of good schools. We didn't start any of them. Education has been included as a fundamental right in the Constitution. This, again, is not our contribution. We are a small state government. Our education model is only breaking the mindset and system where the 5 per cent gets the best kind of education and the 95 per cent gets the worst kind.

In this book, I am writing about imagining, planning and creating a system where on seeing an increase in violence in a city, the chief minister not only directs his chief of police to end the violence in two days but also directs his chief of education to make a plan for ending violent tendencies in people in two years. If we cannot use education to this end, then it essentially means that we do not understand the power education can wield. It shows that our understanding of education is limited to ending poverty or providing employment. Education is capable of doing more, much more.

THE FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION

Budget: A Game Changer

The Delhi government's biggest achievement with regard to the education sector has been that in our very first budget the allocation for the education department was doubled. In fact, not only was it doubled but almost 25 per cent of the annual budget was earmarked for education. This was an unprecedented move, one that was appreciated by all. Everybody agreed that this was the first time that the education budget had been doubled, and that this was the first government to have the courage to allocate one-fourth of its budget to education.

It is not that we didn't face any difficulties, but our goals were clear and so were Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's directions to us that the education department should get the budget it needed. To meet this end, many projects across various departments had to take a back seat, and some even had to be put on hold. Our well-wishers were of the opinion that we should focus on development too and not just education. It gives me immense pleasure to see that the government's intention didn't waver and, in the last four years, the education budget has continued to be allocated one-fourth of the budget. It is not possible to understand this budget in terms of 'double' or '25 per cent' alone. We have to look at the statistics—when we came to power, the Delhi government's budget was only Rs 29,000 crore. In just four years, this has gone up to Rs 53,000 crore. In 2014–15, only 12 per cent of the Rs 29,000 crore-budget was allocated to education. The following year, the budget was increased to Rs 36,000 crore, of which 25 per cent was given to education. Thus, the education budget went up from Rs 4500 crore to Rs 9000 crore. Since then, as the Delhi government's budget has increased, the amount allocated to education too has gone up. It is because of this sizeable budget that we have never had to stop any project citing lack of funds.

Our government is of the opinion that providing quality education to children is its responsibility. Some might argue that when the Right to Education Act (RTE) has been listed in the Constitution as a fundamental right, what is this

(RTE) has been listed in the Constitution as a fundamental right, what is this four-year-old Delhi government trying to claim? What we are trying to say is that though it might be mentioned in the Constitution, the bitter truth is that most governments think that providing education to children is the responsibility of the parents. If the parents want to give their children a good education, then they need to earn well and enrol them in private schools. For all our claims during elections and seminars, the importance given to education by governments can be seen in the condition of school buildings. Many government schools in most states are struggling. Often various governments attribute this largely to the fact that there are no children to teach in these schools. I have, in meetings with other education ministers, asked one question. In the areas where schools are closing down, what is the condition of private schools and how many of these have opened in the last ten to fifteen years? I am still waiting for an answer to this question, but I often wonder whether government schools are closing and private schools are flourishing because some of these have been started by politicians and bureaucrats?

Factors such as the condition of government schools and lack of funds and proper teacher training are testament to the fact that in spite of being mentioned in the Constitution as a fundamental right, education is perceived as something that should be availed in private schools. However, our government thinks that the responsibility of providing a good education is its own, and we are working in that direction. The first step is the allocation of sufficient funds. If a sizeable budget is not allocated to education, then stressing on it in rules, regulations or laws has no meaning.

Infrastructure: Beginning with Basics

Creating a budget for education is no mean feat. We didn't go with some quixotic notion that if the education budget was increased, everything else in the country would be fine. Instead, we had a clearly drawn-out road map, made with utmost honesty and understanding, for the optimal utilization of this budget. To begin with, we created a blueprint. After this, whatever was possible from the Delhi government's budget was allotted to the education sector.

When I began visiting schools, February 2015 onwards, I noticed that they were in rather bad shape. The classrooms were crumbling and dirty and appeared more like junkyards. In some schools, it seemed like seating space had been created for the students in the middle of clutter. Teaching in such conditions was impossible. Ceilings threatening to come crashing down any minute, a few tattered durries to sit on and broken blackboards hanging precariously from the walls, the text written on them in chalk illegible even for the teachers, were common sights. The labs and libraries looked like storerooms of almirahs. Taking out any book or equipment from them meant sticking your hand into a thick layer of dust. Amongst such schools, a few were in a better condition than the others, or were at least halfway better. There were schools where students were being taught in corridors or halls. And in many others, classes were being held under one tree. Therefore, it looked like a scene from a vegetable market, with students talking in unison and teachers screaming to calm them down. No one could understand which student was in which class and was being taught which subject and by whom. Similar scenes played out in schools where classes were held in corridors or ancient halls with walls and ceilings that were somehow managing to hold up.

I got the information collated of the classrooms, playgrounds, labs and libraries, and the administrative work of the schools. I also got a headcount of students in each section in a school. It was surprising that the education department did not already have this information in one place and that we had to

department did not already have this information in one place and that we had to spend at least a month to get it. It is interesting to note here that even to get all this information on a pen drive or as an Excel sheet, rather than a print copy, involved a lot of work. The norm was to forward information in a file if a minister asked for it. But I insisted on emails or soft copies on pen drives. When I finally received the data, I discussed it with a few analysts. We matched the number of students in each class with the infrastructure available. Several surprising facts came up. In the last couple of years, a few schools in rural areas had been built far away from the villages, in farmlands. This was despite the fact that there were schools in the villages with enough space to add more classrooms. The number of students in the village schools was high, but the villagers were not too keen on sending their children to schools located a distance away. This was one of the main reasons for such schools having only three to four hundred students in total. I personally met the principals of these schools at my official residence. I also spoke to some of them over the phone and realized that these schools were arbitrarily developed. It was also observed that contrary to prescription, very few schools had forty to fifty students per section per class. In many classes, the number was close to eighty to 100 per section. While there was no dearth of schools where this number was in the range of 100 to 150, there was one school where, in one class, there were 174 students. When I came across this class, I couldn't help but think that even if God came there as a teacher, forget about teaching, he would struggle to fit them in one classroom. Early 2015 was the year of swallowing the bitter pill to improve the dismal condition of Delhi's government schools. We calculated that to accommodate the present number of students and teachers, and to manage them well, we needed another 30,000 rooms. The solution was to either build new schools or add rooms to the existing ones. We adopted both approaches. This had to be done in consultation with the land and property department of the central government, and if the Delhi government needed any land, it had to request the central government. It was up to the Centre whether to allot the available land or not. In the past, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) had shied away from allotting these resources to the Delhi government. In my opinion, be it right or wrong, they were more interested in selling the land to individuals to make a profit. After many trials and tribulations, the education department was able to get a few plots from the DDA, and we started the work

immediately. We also started making new classrooms in schools that had space. Rooms that were in a state of disrepair were fixed on war footing. In the first round, fifty schools that were in really bad shape were renovated. We also started the process of adding 8000 new classrooms and building twenty-five new schools. Though this number was a lot less than the required 30,000 rooms, we went ahead with this work in the first phase and started looking for land for the second phase. Once we had the resources, we started the second phase of building 12,000 new classrooms. The PWD minister, Satyendra Jain, and I supervised the construction work in some places, and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a few others. An eye was kept on the design of the rooms, labs and libraries, and also on the tiling, boards, lighting and ceilings. At times, it felt like we were getting our own houses built, which was the sentiment behind this initiative. We also started getting the run-down washrooms mended and putting up green boards in every classroom. We gave standing orders to the directorate to get all the classrooms whitewashed every year during the summer vacations. Though initially there were some delays because of departmental slackness and PWD processes, today, it gives us immense satisfaction to see that there isn't a single classroom in Delhi that doesn't have a proper board, or where the fans are broken, or where the washrooms are damaged.

I have always maintained that we aren't the first government to work on education. Many governments before us have contributed to it immensely. From Jawaharlal Nehru to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, many leaders have taken significant steps in the arena of education. However, the one place where they all lagged behind was that the fruit of these attempts was reaped only by 5–10 per cent of the children. Even if there were attempts to make education available to the remaining 90–95 per cent, they were perfunctory and casual. The sky is the limit when it comes to the level education can be taken to. No country can set the upper limit for the quality of education, but wherever remarkable work in the area has been undertaken or from where lessons can be gleaned, we noted that work had been done at the minimum benchmark level. Not only did they decide to give the students the best-ever education, they also determined the level and facilities that every child could access. We also ensured that the level did not fall. This was our attempt in Delhi too. We wanted to be able to say that we would give our children the best possible education but we would not let the level of education and facilities dip beyond a certain point. No room in our

level of education and facilities dip beyond a certain point. No room in our schools would be damaged, there would be no cobwebs in them, they would be whitewashed regularly, the boards inside would be of such a quality that every child would be able to read what was written on them, that all the lights would be functional and every class would have a teacher, etc.

Another major challenge in strengthening school infrastructure was making desks available. To avoid the possibility of any corrupt practices, the system was that desks were sourced from the production unit in Tihar Jail, where convicts made them. There were two problems here. Only a limited number of desks were produced in a day and their design and functionality were very ordinary, even low-quality at times. One wonders why nobody had tried to change the system and why children in Delhi schools were dependent only on the Tihar Jail production unit. I initially met the officers at Tihar to get them to improve the output and designs, but nothing came out of this. It was then that Satyendra Jain and I, with help from the PWD and the education department, broke this system and sourced desks of better quality and design from the market. It wasn't easy to do this. Every officer agreed that getting high-quality desks was possible whenever needed, but they were apprehensive that if they disrupted the existing system of sourcing furniture from Tihar, they might end up there too. It was a strange situation where the government had money, had good education to offer but lakhs of students had to sit on the floor or use broken desks. This situation changed after rigorous efforts and now all Delhi schools have high-quality desks and in requisite number.

While making new classrooms and mending old ones, we stressed on giving them a modern look because this was tied to the self-respect of the students. When a child who goes to a government school compares the building and facilities of his or her school with that of a private school, he or she doesn't just feel bad but also inferior. Giving the schools a modern look wasn't just about functionality but also to root out this inferiority complex from society.

Principals: Empowering Leadership

A teacher is to a school what a pilot is to an aeroplane. Children are like its passengers where everybody else, from parents to the education department, plays the role of the ground staff who ensures that the flight lands safely. If the teacher is the pilot, then the principal is the captain. All of this sounds great but was far from the ground reality of our schools. The role of the principal had been reduced to a low-ranking official in the hierarchy of education, whose job was to only send reports about the schemes introduced, just for the sake of it.

In Delhi, we have taken crucial steps to strengthen the position of the principals and establish them as responsible leaders. Today, the principals of Delhi government schools are equipped to take decisions. They are given rights and ample resources to prepare a vision and come up with schemes that can be implemented for the future of their students.

A few shortcomings usually found in government schools are damaged desks and worn-out blackboards, lights, fans, windows and toilets, among others. To take care of these, now a principal of a Delhi government school does not need to seek permission from the government. Instead, he or she can just access the budget provided to them. Every school building now has an annual budget of Rs 5 lakh to Rs 14 lakh. This can be used without any official intervention. The decision on the use of this budget can be taken at the school level by the school's management committee. Also, to address the issue of insufficient teachers, principals have been given the authority to hire guest teachers and funds have been allocated for their salaries. Not just that, a principal now has the authority and funding to use the services of an expert for any subject or activity. For example, they can call specialists to train students in sports, art and dance, or for entrance tests in different fields such as engineering, medical, CA, etc.

We decided to strengthen the position of the principals at the very inception of our government in 2015. During my surprise inspections, I came across many young, enthusiastic and talented principals who wanted to do something for their

young, enthusiastic and talented principals who wanted to do something for their schools but the government system probably did not have faith in them. They didn't have the freedom to execute their vision. They only had dilapidated school buildings and the support of a beleaguered team of teachers through whose help they had to shape the future of 2000 to 3000 students. The situation was such that the students considered it their fate to bunk schools and roam in markets or sit in parks rather than being in class. I felt that these principals, though few, were like the captains of a sinking ship, desperately trying to keep it afloat; knowing fully well that they would not be able to make it to the shore. I saw a ray of hope when I met them, so I discussed the matter with the chief minister. His immediate response was that the number of visionary principals must be higher than my estimate. He advised that we immediately convene a meeting of the 1000 and above principals. This meeting was organized in April 2015 at Thyagraj Stadium. Here, the chief minister asked the principals to prepare a vision document for their schools. He set a challenge for them, saying that the government would give them all the requisite resources but the ultimate aim was to make government schools so strong that the parents would choose them over private ones. In 2015, this vision would have probably sounded utopian. The proof of this was that out of the 1000 principals, only around 200 submitted the vision document; of these, almost 150 just demanded minor repair work and procurement of green boards, desks, etc. However, fifty-four of them prepared documents detailing their vision for their schools, expectations from the government and a road map for the future. We immediately undertook the work of turning these fifty-four schools into model schools. We employed good and active engineers to make a plan on how to go about the execution of the ideas shared. We also gave the principals a budget to avail the facilities. We studied the other proposals too and made a list of the shortcomings listed. We examined the reasons behind these shortcomings and started to address them in all the 1000 schools. On seeing work being done on the basis of the proposals, the enthusiasm of the principals went up.

However, it surprised me that only 200 principals had sent proposals to the chief minister. Why didn't the others do so? To understand the reason, I began meeting these principals in small groups. We had long chats at my house till late in the night. Over dinners, I understood their point of view, so that we could identify the roadblocks when it came to establishing principals as the leaders of

their schools.

Two points emerged from these discussions. Firstly, the principals had no faith in political leaders. They had seen many politicians who called children the future of the country and then taken commissions even on their mid-day meals. They asked teachers to be more involved in shaping the careers of their students in their speeches and then taken bribes for transferring and posting them. This was one of the reasons why a majority of them had not submitted their ideas as they found it difficult to trust a new party and its government. They also had no faith in the capabilities and commitments of their senior officers. They felt that even if they came up with ideas that the new chief minister and education minister approved of initially, only the will of these officers would be implemented. Another reason was that they thought that their vision would be lost in the dusty files of bureaucracy.

Only time could take away the first doubt from their minds as there was nothing I could do to instil faith in them. I started working on addressing the second point. The principals told me the following:

- They had the freedom to use only Rs 5000 if they needed to get anything done in the school. In such a situation, if a magazine had to be printed or new equipment was needed in the labs, or any repair work had to be done or an annual function or sports day had to be organized and the expenses were more than Rs 5000, they had to get approval from the deputy director of education (DDE). There are about 125 schools in a district. Files of every school with the smallest of requests lie at the DDE's office for months. It is not possible for the DDE to review and accept all of them on a regular basis. This is why a lot of important things get delayed. I asked the officers concerned the reason for limiting the financial independence of principals to Rs 5000. How will they run a school with that amount? Their answer was quite bureaucratic. 'Sir, this has been done to ensure that they don't misappropriate the money.' My answer was that if we were entrusting the principal with a team of fifty to 100 teachers to shape the future of 3000 students, could we not trust him or her with more than Rs 5000? They had no answer to this argument. It was decided that the financial power of the principals would be increased

from Rs 5000 to Rs 50,000. This enabled the principals to take decisions according to their needs, using their wisdom.

- In a similar discussion, one principal asked me, ‘Sir, on the one hand, you always talk about giving children quality education and on the other, you want school buildings to be neat and clean, and windows in classrooms and taps in toilets to be fully functional. Please tell us whether a principal should oversee the education of 3000 to 6000 students or check taps and tube lights in fifty to sixty rooms?’ The principal had a point. I asked for a solution. After further discussions, an idea came up that if an estate manager was hired for every school to supervise cleanliness and repairs in consultation with the principal, then the principal would be able to focus better on the education of the children. This is how, for the first time in the country, the decision to hire estate managers in government schools was taken. At present, every school in Delhi has an estate manager. Schools that run in two shifts have two estate managers.
- The important thing to note in the appointment of estate managers is that they were not hired by the government. A thousand people were not hired in one go. Rather, we drew up a framework for their eligibility and selection, and the responsibility of appointing them was given to the principals. They were told to form a five-member committee under their chairmanship, comprising two teachers and two parents. Also, if the estate manager was inefficient, then firing them and selecting a new one was also the principal’s responsibility. I think that the decision to hand over this responsibility to principals is a big reason for the cleanliness in Delhi schools over the last three years.
- Another interesting aspect of the appointment of estate managers was that when I had put forth the suggestion of giving the responsibility of hiring them to principals, many officers, speaking from experience, said that it would give rise to nepotism. They suggested that we have an independent appointment process. My answer to this was that the principals were free to hire their children as managers since my priority was clean schools. We could debate better processes later. I know it was a lopsided argument but the officers didn’t argue further. The logic was

also that if the right to hire and fire rested with the principals, then it was their responsibility to make sure that the estate managers worked efficiently. Of course, the argument about hiring their children was made in jest. I am very proud of the fact that of 1024 schools, the appointment process in 1023 schools was fantastic. In one school, the principal took advantage of the situation and appointed her husband. This was an abuse of power and independence. When I found out about it, I went to this far-off school in a village for a surprise inspection. I was angry with the principal. However, when I reached the school, I found that it was spic and span. There were no cobwebs anywhere. In spite of the school being in an open, rustic area, there was no dust on the desks or in the rooms. The principal may have abused her power by hiring her husband as the estate manager but she surely had appointed a competent man. All I said to the principal while leaving was, 'Madam, I took the power from the education department and vested it in you. If you misuse it, then the school staff will mock me. They will cite your example and that will give the other principals a bad name. What you have done is wrong.' I received an apology letter from her that evening, informing me that she had fired her husband.

Let me also talk about the advertisement we put out for hiring the estate managers. It said that if you wanted to do something for the children, then the Delhi government needed your services as estate managers in its schools. It was probably the effect of this appeal that most Delhi schools have very enthusiastic estate managers who work diligently from morning to evening. I think the appointment of estate managers was an important landmark in the history of Delhi schools. There are government schools in many states with thousands of students, where principals should be given the authority to keep estate managers so that the condition of these schools can be bettered.

- Another aspect emerged from my discussion with the principals. In many schools, the principals wanted to create a scholastic environment along with the teachers. Most teachers were also keen to teach with all seriousness but a few, out of sheer laziness or incompetence, ruined the environment. They also incited other teachers. In such situations, instead

of scholastic, a political atmosphere was created. To address this, we gave principals the special authority to transfer any two teachers annually whom they thought were disturbing the academic environment of the school. This move was opposed by the teachers, and I believe some principals misused this power to settle scores. However, I see very few principals actually using this authority. It works as a deterrent. I believe that leaders should have a few rights to encourage their team or to discipline them whenever needed.

- Delhi schools principals have either cleared the UPSC exam for the post or have been promoted from the position of vice principals. Some vice principals have been given the charge of head of school. In spite of so many facilities and rights, it was difficult to bolster the morale of most principals to become good leaders. They were not given any training to inculcate leadership skills nor did they have experience of it. In spite of being heads of schools, they were cogs in the hierarchy of the education system. Hence, they didn't feel like leaders. I realized that if the principals didn't become responsible for their schools or have a vision for them, my dream of improving the environment of the schools would remain a dream. So, I decided that to create a hunger to become better, I had to show them schools across the world and familiarize them with international education systems. They had to feel that they were leaders and understand what leadership was about.
- We first sought help from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Lucknow and Ahmedabad to organize school leadership workshops. We prepared a special programme for government school principals in consultation with IIM Ahmedabad. Their team designed this programme on the basis of their interaction with many principals and proposed to conduct the training in Delhi itself. However, I wanted to take the principals out of their schools and the Delhi government system. I wanted them to see the college that was the dream of most children. What exactly is IIM? Who are the people teaching there? How is the environment? How do they teach? The IIM team was a little reluctant to conduct such a huge programme on their campus on such short notice. It was challenging for them to house 1000 principals. However, on my

request, they started the programme on their campus. I am happy that after becoming familiar with the IIMs and their way of working, many of our principals were inspired to do something better and to look at their work with a new perspective.

- However, IIM Ahmedabad was just the beginning. I wanted to give our principals the best international leadership training. To this end, we organized a special programme in tandem with the University of Cambridge and a few other universities in the US. I stressed that visiting schools in Britain and America, and interacting with principals and teachers in schools there, would be the main part of the training. The training at Cambridge yielded very positive results. I noticed that their interest was piqued after this training.
- In the same way, I wanted to send our principals to Finland. Schools in Finland are considered the best in the world. For this, I visited schools there with senior officials from the education department, the education secretary and director. We contacted the government education department and teacher training universities there, and then a special training programme was prepared for our government school principals and education department officials. The Finland training programme also helped our principals understand education at an international level and they were enthused to work harder.

The training at Cambridge, US, and Finland was important to understand a professional approach and international education systems. It definitely helped build leadership qualities in our principals. However, in my opinion, it was the Jeevan Vidya Shivir that played the most important role in understanding education. Based on the philosophy of peaceful coexistence, it was an important step in changing people's idea of education. After attending the workshop, our principals felt that education played a bigger role than just eradicating poverty or providing jobs and that their work as principals was more than giving children an education and helping them clear exams. Through the Jeevan Vidya Shivir, we helped our principals build self-confidence and understand their critical role as leaders in society, country and environment.

My aim was to establish principals as leaders who had a good hold over their schools, had dreams for it and the ability and understanding to fulfil them. As a

minister, it was my duty to ensure that laws and rules didn’t become roadblocks for these principals, and to give them national and international exposure. I believe that these steps have given Delhi schools good leaders who have started grooming children to become good citizens.

Teachers: Re-establishing Trust

Teachers are the pilots of the education system. We need teachers who can steer the society in the right direction for the world to become a better place.

I say this from my experience in government schools, that teachers are often turned into government workers who act as mere executors of policies. This is unfortunate. The government can get them to do any kind of work, such as getting family records filled up, getting a census done, making voter cards, getting surveys done, etc. They come to the school to teach if they can make time after completing all these chores. They are not free to teach and become like clerks in government service. Just like a junior government employee is expected to execute only government orders, teachers too don't have the freedom to select the syllabus or choose the activities they wish the children to engage in. When we hand over the responsibility of teaching to an individual, we do so with the assumption that they have amassed all the knowledge they could and now their role is to just pass on this knowledge to the next generation.

When I started visiting schools in Delhi as the education minister, I realized that the government viewed teachers as typical government employees. They were directed to get family registers filled and surveys taken. If midday meals, uniforms and books were being distributed properly, that was enough to assure the government that the school was running well. In the name of teacher training, some good and some run-of-the-mill educationists were called to deliver lectures during summer vacations. Rosters were made to allot duties to different teachers in different weeks of the vacation. This process of training was given the name of 'seminar'. However, issues such as the problems faced by teachers in teaching their subject, which topics they struggled with, and how that subject was being taught in the rest of the world were never discussed. These teachers had also assumed that the progress of a government employee was limited to the annual appraisal. This was the reason why many teachers thought that their job was just to make students mug up the text in NCERT books. A few

that their job was just to make students mug up the text in NCERT books. A few teachers, who were not happy with this system, would take tuitions before or after the school to earn something extra. There were teachers who considered a government job a ‘blessing’ and had started businesses on the side: grocery shops, property dealing, bookstores, etc. The silver lining was that during my surprise visits, I always met a few teachers who were not happy with the state of government schools and wanted to contribute in a bigger way to improve the future of their students. I also met many experienced and young teachers who were helping their students financially. They would, at times, go to the extent of buying equipment with their own money to explain aspects of their subjects in a better way.

I was amazed during one of my surprise visits. This was during my initial days of becoming the education minister. I was walking down the veranda of a school with the principal when I came across a class, either nursery or class 1, where there were tiny colourful chairs arranged around four or five colourful round tables. This sight was new. Till then, I had only seen classes where desks were arranged one after the other with three or four children lumped together at a desk meant for two. I asked the principal how he had managed to get this done. The principal informed me that one of his teachers had bought this colourful furniture with her own money. This was a pleasant surprise for me. The teacher had considered buying tables and chairs for her students: a more pious deed than offering Rs 20,000–25,000 at a temple on the occasion of her wedding anniversary. The interesting thing is that this teacher was transferred from the school after teaching there for a year. I thought to myself that a flower planted anywhere would spread its fragrance. She was given special honours during Teachers’ Day.

During my school visits, I met many teachers who persevered to help their students despite dirty classrooms and broken blackboards, even though they never got any help from their colleagues or the system. Such teachers encouraged me and, slowly, I started drawing up a list of these teachers and meeting them. In a month or two I came across 400–500 such teachers. I had discussions with them at the secretariat in my free time. Sometimes, I went to their homes and met them and their colleagues over a cup of tea or had long late-night discussions over dinner at my home. I gleaned their grievances from these discussions and also figured out practical ways of resolving them. I realized that

there was a segment of very capable and enthusiastic teachers but because of a few politically inclined or lazy ones the whole system had got a bad name. I kept talking to these teachers and decided to make their ideas an integral part of my vision for our education system. Let me discuss a few of them here:

- The first thing the government did was free teachers from the responsibility of filling family registers or conducting surveys. Now the only duty teachers are sent on is election duty.
- When I took this decision, many government officials who saw teachers as easily available government workers were inconvenienced and protested against the move. They said that the work of filling family records would stop as there was no other system for it. My position as the deputy CM came to the rescue here. It strengthened my position as the education minister. I asked these officials: On what basis did the government appoint these teachers? Was it because of their ability to teach or to fill family records? Did we employ them on the basis of their B.Ed degrees or because they could conduct surveys? This is how things work in the government. Even if the senior gives a bogus line of argument, juniors have to listen and follow. My intention was also good here, which is why their protests fell on deaf ears.
- I also found out that the education department made a weekly schedule for teachers detailing which chapters from the NCERT had to be taught within what kind of stipulated time. They had to write weekly progress reports. This seemed like a kind of slavery. Officials might have had their reasons but saddling 50,000 teachers with such a detailed schedule because of a few incompetent employees was not the right way to go. It didn’t allow them the possibility either to explain something in greater detail or try something different in case the students were not able to understand. In my opinion, teachers should have the freedom to teach chapter 10 instead of chapter 1 in the first week if they deem it fit. We did away with this stifling schedule and directed teachers to draw up their own monthly schedule in their diaries and follow it. They now chart their progress in the report diary. I believe this inspired capable and diligent teachers to take initiative.

- We also realized that a lot of teachers were unhappy with the NCERT textbooks. They had problems with the examples, exercises, vocabulary and words in them but there was nothing they could do about it. The education department had prohibited the use of guidebooks and even announced that if any teacher was found teaching from them in class, he/she would face disciplinary action. According to me, this too had been forced upon them. Officials had their reasons, some of which were valid. Publishers could join hands with principals and teachers and influence students to buy their books. I have seen this malpractice even during my own schooldays which is why I thought we needed to find a solution to this problem. We decided that teachers would create their own guidebook and support material. Work started on this, and during the summer break of 2016, teachers of different subjects and schools got together to conduct subject-specific workshops for four days. Teachers spoke about their needs and specific requirements. They also contributed to the discussion from the perspective of their own knowledge of a subject. A team of teachers gave finishing touches to these support materials on the basis of their learnings from these discussions. These support materials, titled Pragati, were published by the Directorate of Education and made available to all students. This was the first such attempt and it was hugely successful. The content of these support materials was based on the NCERT textbooks but the teachers had kept in mind the students' needs. Since then, during every summer break, teachers of different subjects convene to update these support materials.
- Another big issue in Delhi schools was that of guest teachers, though their appointment is a practice across the country. It is becoming increasingly common to hire talented teachers on a guest basis in the name of some scheme or project instead of giving them permanent positions. One reason for this could be that the number of private schools across the country is increasing while the level of government schools is degrading. Not just in Delhi, but in even in villages and small towns, if any family prospers a little, it tries to get its children admitted into a private school. So, students in government schools come from very poor families and hence seldom protest against the prevailing system. When

teachers are hired on a permanent basis, they have to be paid full government salaries. A permanent teacher's salary is around Rs 60,000 to Rs 1 lakh a month while a guest teacher can be hired for just Rs 5000–15,000 a month. The helplessness of less-privileged students and parents and this price dynamics is making the whole system ad-hoc-centred. If only permanent teachers are hired, then there will be no money left to pay for big projects from which hefty commissions can be earned. Such factors have contributed to the practice of hiring guest teachers in which everyone, from ministers to the education department, is complicit.

There have been a limited number of appointments of teachers in Delhi since 2007. Of the 50,000 teachers, almost 18,000 were on a guest or contract basis. Their salaries were between Rs 10,000 and Rs 18,000. We tried to make teachers who had been working for a long time permanent on the basis of their experience and by giving them a selection test. However, some court rulings came in the way. After that, we tried passing a bill in the Vidhan Sabha to make these teachers permanent but here the central government didn't let it happen because of the matter being under Services, which comes under the purview of the central government. The salary of a guest teacher is not enough to sustain a family, so we tried to bring their salaries on par with that of permanent employees. Now, guest teachers are paid comparable salaries based on their positions, except for a few benefits that are only for the permanent employees. This step may not have ended the injustice being done to these guest teachers, but at least they are now being paid enough to sustain their families. Till 2015, all guest teachers would be removed from their position every year and then hired again the next year. No guest teacher could focus entirely on teaching because of this practice. For this reason, we put an end to it, in turn putting an end to this uncertainty and financial instability in the lives of guest teachers. This has been a big part of the Delhi education model. Delhi is the only state in India now where guest teachers are treated much the same way as permanent teachers.

- Another big step the Delhi government has taken to empower teachers is giving each of them, whether permanent or guest, a tablet (computer).

This has helped them take attendance and prepare results online so they can avoid unnecessary paperwork. Another advantage is that everything, from attendance of students and teachers to exam results, is now available to the education minister, education secretary and director. In order to avoid any delays or questions on the quality or price, we gave Rs 15,000 to each teacher to purchase tablets of their choice.

It would be interesting to mention here that it took me two years to make tablets available to teachers. The plan was made in 2016. The file of the proposal kept moving between the IT, finance and education departments. It took this long in spite of the fact that the proposal was by an education minister who was also the deputy CM and the finance minister of a state. When I had first floated the proposal, a senior IAS officer had said in a meeting, 'We have made computers available in schools, why do we need to give the teachers tablets?' I replied that we should only get a computer for the office of the CM and stop bothering about providing computers to the secretaries, deputy secretaries and directors. The IAS officer couldn't counter that. However, if you look at the delay in processing the request, you realize that there were many in the government who were of the same opinion as him. They felt it was a waste of resources, but I was happy that I finally got the proposal approved.

- We also undertook the renovation of staffrooms keeping in mind the dignity of the post and the teachers' ease. We wanted to change the storeroom-like rooms with their shabby desks surrounded by broken cupboards into rooms where teachers could sit with pride and talk, eat and read. We also decided to install a coffee machine and fridge in every staffroom. This proposal had also been sent in 2016 to the education department but it met the same fate. None of the officials opposed it openly, but from the time it took for the files to pass it was clear that they were not too happy about this expense. In fact, a comment was even passed at some point that coffee machines can be installed but the coffee powder in it should come from the teachers' own money. But I ensured the proposal was not put in cold storage, and finally, after two years of to and fro of files, the renovation of the staffrooms has begun. I hope that

> soon all schools in Delhi will have new staffrooms with fridges and coffee machines.

It is not just about the expense of tablets or fridges or coffee, but about the attitude of the government machinery towards teachers. For them, computers worth lakhs and expensive printers, etc., in their own offices is justified, but giving teachers a cup of coffee worth Rs 5–10 is a waste of money. My aim was not to get the teachers alms of Rs 5–10 as the Delhi government pays its teachers well enough that they can treat ten to fifteen people to cups of coffee every day, but my intention was that the education department respects its teachers. When teachers come to the staffroom after teaching their students, they should feel like they have entered an oasis of comfort. I want the rooms to be clean, for there to be tea or coffee and water to rejuvenate them. It's not about money but about respect. It's about giving them due respect through small gestures. In our country, it is said about teachers:

> *Guru Gobind Dou Khade,*
> *Kake lagun paye?*
> *Balihari Guru aapne Govind diyo bataye.*
>
> Both God and my teacher stand in front of me, whom do I bow to? I am indebted to you, Teacher, for you have shown me the way to God.

Giving certain facilities to teachers and including them in the working of the education department, giving them responsibilities outside the classrooms is an important step. It is also said:

> *Guru Bin Gyan Na Upaje,*
> *Guru Bin mile na moksha.*
> *Guru Bin lakhe na satya ko*
> *Guru Bin mite na dosha.*
>
> Without the teacher no one can obtain knowledge or achieve salvation. Without the teacher no one can see the truth or have his doubts removed.

However, I think these were just baby steps that helped improve the state of education in Delhi. Of the two biggest steps taken to empower teachers, one was the Mentor–Teacher Programme. Mentors were selected from among the teachers of government schools and given the responsibility of five schools each.

For capacity–building, they were given teacher training at national and international levels. It is a unique programme in its own right and is discussed in the next chapter.

Let's discuss the second step, another effort made with the active participation of teachers. People usually worry a lot about the weight of school bags but nobody thinks about reducing it to make the lives of children and teachers simpler. In my understanding, no political party or education department has taken any steps towards achieving this. We started working on this in 2015. Our curriculum in Delhi is based on the CBSE board. To make any changes in the curricula of classes 9–12, we have to get permission from CBSE and NCERT, but they have no say in the curricula till class 8. So, in the first stage, we decided to cut 25 per cent of the syllabus till class 8. The decision was made, but which committee of experts would decide what was important and what wasn't? I thought that there couldn't be better experts than the teachers who teach these courses and interact with the students every day. So, we asked the teachers which chapters or topics were not so important and could be omitted. The syllabus was reduced based on their inputs.

The role of teachers is not limited to standing in front of a class and teaching from books written by other experts. Giving them the freedom to design the syllabus, compile support materials and certain other facilities is an important step to make teachers feel respected—which is not being done, especially in government schools. I am of the opinion that no matter how much money you spend, how beautiful your schools are, or how good your courses are, unless you show your teachers respect, and involve them in decision-making, no work on education is possible. The teacher is not a delivery person. Teachers are institutions that convey the knowledge of one generation to another, point out the faults of the previous system to the next generation and develop new knowledge. Their responsibility also includes teaching students the skill of questioning the knowledge and opinions of previous generations. It is this spirit of questioning and rebellion that will lead to discoveries and inventions. Hence, it is important to make teachers financially and mentally free, so they can teach freely. All the attempts made by the Delhi government were to ensure this, though a lot remains to be done.

Mentor–Teacher: A New Tradition

When I took over the charge as the education minister of Delhi, I realized that government school teachers didn't have anyone to guide them. There were no experienced persons or consulting agencies which could help them enhance their domain knowledge and hone their skills, or even look for solutions to challenges in teaching or learn newer, better methods of teaching. In other parts of the world, especially where the education system is truly evolved, a lot of emphasis is placed on mentoring and training teachers; encouraging them to adopt new ways of teaching. In our country, however, such exercises are often considered a sheer waste of resources. In a hierarchical order teachers have principals above them who have other responsibilities such as school administration and exams, etc., leaving them with little time to mentor the teachers. Even if they find the time, they can only mentor them in the subject they are familiar with. When I was closely studying education models in other countries around the world, I found that other than subject–teachers, mentor–teachers played a big role in developing an academic environment in the school, monitoring and analysing it constantly.

My advisers, Atishi and Shailendra along with the officers in the Directorate of Education, designed a framework to initiate the mentorship programme for teachers. There were many obstacles in this endeavour. The first being that the mentor–teacher post did not exist in the government. And second, who would do this work? We drew up a plan for this. We decided to have one mentor for every five schools. Then the next challenge was how to identify these mentors. So, I sent a letter to all the teachers in Delhi outlining my vision and wrote in detail about the role of the mentor–teacher. I exhorted these teachers to take on this responsibility on a voluntary basis. Around 1200 teachers from different schools wrote back expressing an interest to become mentor–teachers. Before we received the letters, I had met almost 2000 to 3000 teachers and principals, either in groups or on a one-to-one basis, and discussed my vision with them. They had

in groups or on a one-to-one basis, and discussed my vision with them. They had seen from our endeavours—from increasing the budget to various other measures—that we were committed to improving the state of education, and the message had reached almost all the schools. At the same time, a few teachers were upset because of my surprise inspections and of my efforts to bring more discipline in schools. However, they knew that measures were being taken only against the most lethargic and careless. I was enthused to see so many applications for the post of mentors.

This was only an idea at this point. We still had to do all the legwork and we needed only 200 mentor–teachers for 1000 schools. So, we did extensive verification of the outcomes of their teaching/learning strategies, their relations with other teachers and asked them to write a note on why they wanted to become mentor–teachers. On the basis of this, an unbiased and strict selection procedure was put in place. We conveyed to these applicants that rather than following the regular timetable, they would have to work for almost twenty-four hours a day for a year. They would have to work day in, day out to create an academic environment in the schools assigned to them. We had many schemes in our mind to encourage these mentor–teachers. For example, they would be paid an extra month's salary in the year, given special training, provided space in the deputy director's office, sent for national and international teacher training programmes, etc. Some of these plans didn't come to fruition because of departmental obstacles and issues in financial rules, but I believe that we found an amazing batch of 200 mentor–teachers in the very first year. Whenever I met them, their body language exuded self-confidence.

Initially, some teachers felt a little strange that a teacher from outside their school would interfere in their classes, but things smoothened out after a while and our initiative was a big success.

Taking the plan forward, we decided to take 100 new mentor–teachers every year and retain 100 from the previous year. Thus, one mentor–teacher could stay in the post for two years but every year we would have 100 new ones. What did these mentor–teachers do? What was their experience? What was their contribution? To answer these questions, I am including excerpts from the feedback received from principals and a few mentor–teachers. One can gauge their contribution in the teaching–learning environment in the schools from these excerpts.

‘I began this journey in March 2016 after getting inspired by Deputy CM Manish Sisodia’s letter to teachers. His thought of “bringing revolution in the world of education” inspired me to go beyond teaching a few students in a few classes to explore new methodologies and hone my skills. I realized that it was time to work together for positive results.’

—Sheetal, mentor–teacher

‘I would like to mention Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Chandpur Majra, while talking about the mentor–teacher initiative. In 2016, the number of students was 225, in 2017, it increased to almost 350. The reason for this was that teachers went to Majra Davas and Chandpur Village in a group to meet the locals and were successful in rebuilding their confidence in government schools.

In the same way, Rajkiya Kanya Vidyalaya, Begumpur, was facing the issue of absenteeism. After consulting the head of the school and other teachers, we contacted the parents and, as a result, irregularity is almost nil in the school now.

I didn’t face any major difficulties as a mentor–teacher, but there was some opposition from a few teachers in the initial days. One has to make a few efforts to go against the grain and shake things up.’

—Dr Karamveer Singh, mentor–teacher

‘I consider the mentor–teacher programme a wonderful step towards the empowerment of teachers. For years, I have seen teachers being dependent on others, obedient to government diktats and just obeying the rules of the education department and fulfilling the expectations of the officials. The mentor–teacher programme has given us the confidence and opportunity to decipher the aim of teaching, understand the needs of teachers and students and take informed decisions in keeping with those needs. This is not about training 200 mentor–teachers but a step towards bringing all the teachers to work together in unison.’

—Alok Kumar Mishra, mentor–teacher

‘As a mentor–teacher, I performed the role of preparing the teaching–learning material for my schools and discussing it, inspiring teachers and guiding them to adopt newer ways of teaching. To understand ways in which the teaching–learning process could be made more innovative, I took many demo classes. To create a scholastic environment in school and outside of it, I organized workshops for parents too.’

—Sandeep, mentor–teacher

‘Interacting with teachers and telling them about the experiments of others in the profession made me see the curiosity teachers have for their subjects and ways of teaching. The biggest change was in the conduct of teachers in classrooms, and in my interaction with students I found it was felt by them as well.’

—Balistar Kumar, mentor–teacher

‘I always considered myself a perfect teacher. I always thought that a good educator was one who had a tight hold on his/her subject and taught it in innovative ways. When I started sitting on the last bench as a mentor–teacher, observing classes, I realized how different learning and teaching were. As a mentor, it is my endeavour to reduce this gap between teaching and

learning.’

—Bhavna Savnani, mentor–teacher

‘While supervising class 8 in Rajkiya Kanya Vidyalaya School, Block Shakarpur, it was found that one student was irregular to school. One day when she came to the class, I spoke with her but she couldn’t give a clear reason for her irregularity. I requested one of my colleagues to watch her closely and take care of her. A few days later, she found out that the student was emotionally distraught. Her mother had left home, her father had remarried and the child was living with her grandmother. With my colleague’s “connect” and emotional support, the child started attending school regularly and her academic performance improved. Most of the work was done by my colleague, but, as a mentor, I have often drawn the attention of teachers towards students who get overlooked during the regular school schedule.’

—Vishnu Kumar Pande, mentor–teacher

‘I remember that when the education minister wrote to us asking us to come forward as mentor–teachers to contribute towards better education, he said that only those who wanted to work without expecting a position or money should do so. I filled the application form for mentorship with a lot of enthusiasm and got selected. I wanted to do something new and good. I knew working as a mentor would give my enthusiasm and vigour the right platform. I had two big challenges before me—my own familial responsibilities and the desire to do better as a teacher. My personal challenge was that 80 per cent of my husband’s liver had been declared damaged, and he needed a transplant. My son was also appearing for class 12 board examinations. Many of my colleagues advised me to not become a mentor and focus on my family. But I wanted to do something for education, and I became a mentor. I am happy to say that my husband is well and my son has cleared his exams, and I am involved in the great endeavour to improve the level of education.

As a mentor–teacher, I have seen a number of challenges in schools—the lack of self-confidence in children, lack of family support, irregular school attendance, parents not meeting teachers in spite of being called or going away to their native villages for long durations.’

—Usha Kiran, mentor–teacher

‘I have worked at a lot of schools as a teacher, and I have found something new everywhere. I didn’t want to let go of this opportunity which would add to my experience. I have contributed to education in a meaningful way and have been a part of many reforms in my two years as a mentor–teacher. In this journey, I have also participated in many training programmes. This initiative has given me the opportunity to visit national and international educational institutions where we met some excellent teachers and scholars. I was able to assess myself and become a better teacher. The use of technical words in teaching in the Singapore training programme influenced me, and I am trying to use these words in my interactions with my colleagues.’

—Sheelu, mentor–teacher

‘Not everything was as easy as it seemed in this process of change. The first challenge that I faced in this journey was the thought process of my colleagues. They were resistant to change.

When I started working as a mentor–teacher, I thought that I would get the opportunity to show other schools my teaching skills, experiments in the classroom and my capabilities. My outlook changed completely as the journey progressed. I didn’t have to showcase my abilities in

outlook changed completely as the journey progressed. I didn't have to showcase my abilities in the classroom. The work went a lot deeper. As a mentor–teacher, my role was to observe the practices of other teachers, understand them and inspire the teachers to look at education as a noble profession. I had to consider their feelings so that they did their work more diligently, worked honestly to change the lives of their students and improved their own abilities. I had to ignite the desire in my colleagues to do something new and experiment in classrooms. In a sense, this was an ambitious programme to change the overall environment of the school.

I saw many ups and downs in this time and did many experiments too. I'd like to talk about one such experiment. I had to make question papers for the different classes and subjects in the six schools I was associated with. Coordinating with so many teachers and finishing the work on time was in itself a big challenge. I personally compiled all the questions collected from all the different teachers and put them in serial order and made it available to everyone twenty days before the mid-term exams. I had to work hard to coordinate with the teachers from the six schools and to get them to reach a consensus. This effort disrupted the prevalent notion that it is not possible to work on one project with so many different schools. It also gave me an understanding of what different teachers in different schools thought of their subjects and which topics they thought were important.'

—Naseem Bano, mentor–teacher

'I am primarily associated with mathematics. One of the reasons for joining this programme was to remove the fear of maths in students. Everybody in schools keeps talking about it being a difficult subject. In my opinion, it is a very enjoyable subject and once you have understood and practised it, you can keep doing more. To this end, I conducted exercises and activities designed by me in my classes. As a mentor–teacher, I share these exercises in all the schools and training programmes.'

—Manju Sharma, mentor–teacher

'There are many noteworthy incidents from my experience as a mentor–teacher, but to summarize, the perception among teachers that 'some students cannot learn' has changed. I saw a spark in the eyes of the children when they learnt how to read. The students, who were earlier disinterested, now participate actively in class activities. It is heartening that the achievement of the students has become a topic of discussion in staffrooms among teachers.'

—Yogesh Kumar, mentor–teacher

'I had to face some opposition when I started visiting schools. This was because some teachers just had the mentality of clocking in hours. The entire attention of the school was on the results of classes 9 to 12 but classes till class 6 often went without teachers. My frequent visits and constant cajoling brought about some change. Scolding and hitting stopped. Attendance improved. Activities conducted by a few teachers also opened doors for development.

I'd like to share my experience too. There was a student in Sarvodaya Vidyalaya Deenpura who was always getting into fights and was uninterested in studies. Every time I visited the school, I tried talking to her lovingly, but she had become a big problem for her teachers. A few days ago, when I was passing by her class, she came running to me and told me that she had learnt how to read. When she took me to her class, I thought she had probably learnt how to read Hindi. I was surprised when she read out a page from her English book. I still get gooseflesh when I remember the happy moment. As a mentor–teacher I see my achievement here—being able to make my mentees believe in their strength, knowledge and their actual role.'

—Asha Sharma, mentor–teacher

‘In my opinion, the biggest achievement of the mentorship programme is that it has given students and teachers in government schools self-confidence and pride. Speaking for myself, I got the chance to understand my work and myself better as a mentor–teacher.’

—Anuradha Jain, mentor–teacher

‘While working as a mentor–teacher in two of my schools, I came across teachers who were reluctant to conduct experiments in science labs because they were worried about what the students would think of them if they couldn’t use the equipment properly. I took practical sessions in both the schools and deliberately portrayed myself as unsuccessful in front of the students. This removed the hesitation amongst teachers. This also reduced the negativity that students had towards unsuccessful experiments.’

—Ajay Kishore, mentor–teacher

‘As a mentor–teacher, I have been learning new methods of training and have been sharing them with my colleagues. I have observed that my small interventions have been instrumental in bringing about a change in the teachers’ behaviour and in their style of teaching. Teachers have now started thinking beyond the four walls of the school. The biggest challenge is to change the fixed mindset of a few teachers and to inspire them to adopt new methods of teaching for better results.’

—Rajan Kumar, mentor–teacher

‘After working as a mentor–teacher, I have experienced a change in my personality. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of communication skills, lack of cooperation among colleagues and lack of time management in teachers were some of the challenges that I faced. Striking a balance between my work as a mentor–teacher and my family was another major challenge.

I created ten WhatsApp groups of teachers teaching science in my schools. On these, I shared new and interesting aspects of teaching. I also realized that along with working on science as a subject, there was an urgent need to work with lab assistants in laboratories. By encouraging lab assistants and by training them, I observed many changes in the science teaching programmes.’

—Jairam, mentor–teacher

‘We have tasted both successes and failures in our journey of mentorship. Our education department officials have been with us all the way. These senior officials have played a big and positive role in making the journey exciting and interesting for us.’

—Aditi Bhasin, mentor–teacher

‘Absence of students in schools was a big challenge for me. At one point, the attendance in Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya, Jaffarabad, fell to 30 per cent. We were told that the attendance was low because of Ramadan. I consulted my colleagues. Four of us teachers went to the nearby mosque and had a discussion on the current activities at the school and the potential loss to students due to their absence there. The imam of the mosque assured us that he would make announcements in mornings and evenings for children to attend school. Meanwhile, we kept in touch with him and gradually, with our efforts, the attendance went up to 85 per cent. This

touch with him and gradually, with our efforts, the attendance went up to 85 per cent. This instilled a new excitement and zeal to work in students and teachers.'

—Sanjiv Tayal, mentor–teacher

'As a mentor–teacher, I got plenty of opportunities to converse with children and their guardians, and I realized that only a person listens to another person and only a person opens up to another. This makes it important that we necessarily present ourselves as people first. Students and teachers are just roles. The real outlook should be that one person communicates with the other.'

—Janamjeya Sharma, mentor–teacher

'For a long time after becoming a mentor–teacher, I wasn't able to understand what to do. Becoming a mentor was challenging work. Fulfilling the expectations of all stakeholders of the school is like walking a tightrope. There were many challenges in some schools—lack of coordination among various stakeholders, lack of trust between teachers, students and parents, absence of discourses and discussions on issues pertaining to education, lack of desire to work on new experiments in the educational apparatus. However, with continuous professional development by the department, my capabilities got honed. The "coexistence vision" taught at the Jeevan Vidya Shivir helped me understand the role of education and teachers better. I learnt new ways of teaching through theatre workshops such as "Nayi Taleem" [New Lesson], which I shared with the teachers of my schools. I still teach one or two classes in my parent school in which I also invite my colleagues. I see a sapling of change sprouting through these efforts.'

—Ila Verma, mentor–teacher

'As a teacher I try to give my best. Even then a few of my students lag behind in learning and understanding. This was always a big question for me.

I always used to wonder what work did a principal have other than merely signing papers. However, after visiting different schools and attending school leadership workshops organized by 'Creatnet' with a few principals, I understood the responsibilities of the head of a school. I even explained the role of the principal to the teachers in my schools and this helped in changing the environment of the school.'

—Gurvinder Kaur, mentor–teacher

'Working as a teacher, the everyday monotonous teaching–learning classroom routine, unit tests and many repetitive programmes in schools were building disappointment in me. I was losing interest in my work. I started feeling that there was no scope for me to do anything new or look at my work in a new light. When the opportunity to work as a mentor–teacher came up, I felt like this was my calling. I got to be the mentor–teacher of five schools. Till the time I was working in one school, I had only one family. Now, I had the chance to work in five different schools or with five different families with absolutely different DNA.

As a mentor–teacher I was able to understand the mindset of learners, and I felt that all of education needs to be seen from the perspective of learners. I feel that I have been able to help my colleagues and myself successfully in this.'

—Uma Shankar, mentor–teacher

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‘Speaking from experience as a mentor–teacher, I would say that the mentorship programme has transformed the gossip sessions in staffrooms to discussions on teaching techniques and understanding of subjects. “How to improve the learning levels of students” is now a common topic of discussion. Now, teachers contact me on their own to share their challenges and the possible solutions.’

—Amit Sharma, mentor–teacher

‘As a mentor teacher, I got the opportunity to work in the assessment unit. In this, there were many discussions on ways of assessing practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge, type of questions to be asked, etc. There’s an incident worth mentioning here. In search of ways to improve the question papers of classes 6 to 8, we visited a school and experimented with a few questions. We tried to find out which questions brought out which aspect of learning in a child and what could the question be and what else we could know using that question. This was a new experiment for me.’

—Kadambari Lohiya, mentor–teacher

‘In my journey from being a student to a teacher, I have known and comprehended the education system well. It was no surprise for me that our school system was not doing a good job and needed improvement. There had been good teachers in our system before this government came to power but they were few in number. These teachers didn’t view teaching as a profession but as a mission. I am happy that this government started the mentorship programme and started working earnestly towards bringing these good teachers to the fore and increasing their number.’

—Pankaj Utreja, mentor–teacher

‘While working as a mentor–teacher, I saw that two schools didn’t have enough teachers. One didn’t have an Urdu teacher but had a Punjabi teacher and the other needed a Punjabi teacher but had an Urdu teacher. I worked as a bridge between the two schools and with my efforts both teachers started teaching in both schools. This was a new role for a mentor–teacher.’

—Roshan Jahaan Shefi, mentor–teacher

‘The best thing that has happened to me after joining this programme is that I have become my own mentor now. Capacity building programmes have helped me a lot and one outcome is my selection for the prestigious Fulbright Fellowship. This has given me the opportunity to stay and learn in the US for five months. At the same time, the mentorship programme has given me a platform where I can share what all I have learnt with my fellow teachers of English.’

—Gaurav Choudhary, mentor–teacher

‘It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from the teachers taking different subjects in schools. Learning their styles, techniques of making difficult concepts easier was an eye-opener. I shared these learning experiences from one class with teachers in other classes and schools. This helped me establish a good rapport with my colleagues in my mentee schools. Not just this, sharing classroom practices across subjects provided important insights into classroom pedagogy. Teachers of different subjects were able to use the techniques from one subject and recontextualize them in another subject. This was helpful in getting everyone together.’

—Kamayani Joshi, mentor–teacher

‘The mentorship programme enhanced my pedagogic skills. It prepared me for my interview for admission to the PhD programme in Jamia Millia Islamia. I got this confidence as a result of my observation and understanding of different facets of the teaching–learning process in different subjects, with different teachers and students in five of my mentee schools. All this led to my deep understanding of classroom dynamics and education.

During the mentorship programme, I participated in a fifty-day “Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA)” programme in the US. This was also attended by the best teachers from nineteen other countries. During this time, I observed the various innovations in teaching and understood their procedural details and importance minutely. The mentorship programme gave me numerous opportunities to carry these innovations in my classrooms in my mentee schools for the benefit of the students.

One such innovation that I tried in my mentee school was teaching English through music and dance. Beginning with leisure listening, moving on to selective and finally to attentive listening, this method improved the oral and aural skills of my students. This innovation of mine was appreciated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

With all humility I state that I have been conferred with the “National Award to Teachers 2017” by MHRD. For this small achievement, I give due credit to the mentorship programme, which has been a boon, both to my personal as well as professional development.’

—Manu Gulati, mentor–teacher

‘This programme is a revolution in the education setup not only of modern India but also of Delhi. It has instilled confidence in those children who could never ask questions earlier and were at the receiving end of jokes. Meeting teachers from other schools as mentor–teachers taught me something new every day. During the mentorship period, adopting the Pragati books, participating in seminars with teachers and training with scholars were marvellous experiences.’

—Mukesh Jain, mentor–teacher

‘The one big change that the mentorship programme has brought in my school is that it has changed the mindset of teachers. I have seen a change in the teaching technique of teachers who have been working for a long time in the same traditional way. As a principal, I feel that the mentor–teacher programme has helped me a lot academically.’

—Rajalakshmi Ravi Shankar, principal, Rajkiya Kanya Vidyalaya, Number 3, Bholanath Nagar

‘In my school, the maths teacher was facing difficulties in explaining a few topics to the students. He didn’t realize that he wasn’t explaining it to them properly. The mentor–teacher helped this teacher immensely and helped him mark the important parts of the syllabus and explain it to students in new and interesting ways. ’

—Swadesh Kumari, principal, Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Vishwas Nagar

‘Under the mentor–teacher programme, one is associated not just with teachers and students but also directly with the education department. This enables the expertise and experience of mentor–teachers to be channelized and used in conducting programmes for the education department.’

Sunita Dhavan, principal, Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, GTB Nagar

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‘I am of the opinion that there is an urgent need for improvement in the teaching–learning process and pedagogy. I firmly believe that this can be done only and only through the mentor–teacher programme.’

—Dharmesh Sharma, principal, Rajkiya Bal Vidyalaya, Azadpur Colony

‘The mentorship programme in Delhi government schools has contributed a lot towards education. Be it in teaching or non-teaching work, our mentor–teacher has helped all my teachers immensely. She is always available to us over the phone. With the positive support of the mentor–teacher, it is not just the academic results that have improved remarkably in our school, but she has also created an atmosphere of healthy discussions around students’ behaviour and conduct among the students themselves.’

—Sadhana Agarwal, principal, Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Punjabi Bagh

‘My teachers now come fully prepared with lesson plans to the class because of the mentorship programme. The mentor–teacher has helped in a big way to identify and help students who need support and to make them successful through special activities.’

—Shiv Charan Meena, principal, Rajkiya Vidyalaya, Nana Khairi

‘The mentor–teacher of my school helped bring about a change by giving demo classes and inspiring teachers by adopting new ways of teaching. He himself counsels students of classes 6 to 12. He also helps in planning positive and creative activities to engage mischievous students.’

—T.R. Verma, principal, Rajkiya Vidyalaya, Najafgarh

‘I see the teacher mentorship programme as a bridge between principals and teachers on the one hand and improving communication between teachers and students in classrooms on the other.

The mentor–teacher in my school helped me understand the aims and benefits of different programmes for us by the government. The mentor–teacher explained the aim and framework of these programmes to my team and me and helped us understand the problems and look for solutions. In my opinion, it is important to increase the frequency of the mentors’ school visits to make the mentorship programme even more successful.’

—Devendra Jain, principal, Rajkiya Bal Vidyalaya, Shahdara

‘My mentor–teacher has always helped me make my school better but because of the busy schedule, he/she has trouble coming to the school every day. I feel that the frequency of the mentor–teacher’s visits should be increased.’

—Dr Shalini, principal, Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Dhakka

‘The mentor–teacher in my school works closely with the teacher development coordinator (TDC), art teachers and other teachers and motivates them to use innovative teaching techniques. He also takes demo classes and discusses science, the happiness class and Mission Buniyad and helps them change their perspectives.’

—A.K. Pandey, principal, Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Najafgarh

Many principals have often requested that the frequency of mentor–teachers' school visits be increased. It shows that principals understand the role they play and think they are important for the school. However, every mentor–teacher has to visit five schools to do their work. On top of that, it is important for them to attend all the meetings in schools and the directorate so that they can understand government schemes and expectations better. They are also given different kinds of training during the mentorship period and have to attend many conferences. This is the reason it is not possible for any mentor–teacher to visit five or six schools every day. So, to take this programme forward, the government has started a TDC programme in every school. This is in one way, the next stage of the mentor–teacher programme. Under this, one teacher has been identified in every school and given the same work as that of the mentor–teacher. I hope this model proves to be beneficial for our nation too.

Parents: Participation with Dignity

Parents and teachers are like two pole stars in the education of children. When we talk about bringing change in education or about reimagining education policies, more often than not we merely focus on schools, boards, the secretariat, curricula, etc. As a society, we feel that the role of the parents is confined to the house, and they should only focus on improving the environment for studying and learning at home. There are no policies or plans, however, to include parents actively in the education of their children. The reason for this is that we have never thought of building a bridge between schools and parents. This is largely why teachers try to improve their students' knowledge base through the school curriculum or syllabus while parents try to mould them on the basis of their life experiences. The situation in Delhi schools was worse. In villages, teachers are familiar with the milieu of the students as they mostly live in the same area. On the other hand, in a place such as Delhi, students and teachers rarely come from the same area. Students usually come from localities far removed from the places the teachers inhabit. In most of the cases, I have seen teachers being appointed to schools 5–20 km away from where they live, but the population from which the students come usually lives at a distance of 3–4 km from the schools. This is the reason for the limited social interaction between the teachers and the parents of the students after school. This could also be the reason for the lack of communication between them. I felt that it was critically important to break this wall. We collectively decided to entrust school management committees with this responsibility. These committees were formed under the Right to Education Act 2009 but till then had existed only on paper.

The first most important step that was taken after we came into power was the proper formation of the School Management Committee (SMC). We observed that committees existed in many schools just on paper. The members who were elected were nominated by the principals and not by the guardians and, at times, this was done under local political influence. So, we decided to hold the

this was done under local political influence. So, we decided to hold the elections democratically. To create an interest and participation among guardians, we chalked out a plan to make them aware of the committee's role. For this, we created a pamphlet that was given to them by their children. Getting the parents of 15 lakh students to cast their vote for the SMC of the school where their child studied was a new challenge for the education ministry. Officers were also overwhelmed by the thought of it. They didn't have the experience or wherewithal to handle even the 3000 to 4000 voters each school usually got. For Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections, 4000 to 6000 voters come to cast their vote at each centre. To handle them, the Election Commission, district magistrate (DM), sub-district magistrate (SDM), the police force and government officials are employed. Hence, organizing elections for such a large number of voters without the help of the administration and police was a big responsibility. However, the SMC was not some political experiment but a compulsory organization to be formed in schools as per the Right to Education Act. So, the Directorate of Education could not avoid this duty. And our government was not in favour of forming a committee to represent 3000 to 4000 parents through nominations made by ministers and principals. In a democracy, the processes of election and nomination should be democratic.

There are sixteen members in the SMC, of whom twelve are guardians of students from that school. The government organizes elections for their selection. These committees have been formed twice since 2015. When elections were held in 2015 and 2017, I had sent letters through students to their guardians to boost their interest and participation. For a lot of them, the presence of such a committee in schools was news. This was the reason why not many stood for elections or voted the first time. Despite this, about 100 to 200 parents per school cast their vote. Their numbers encouraged the education department and school teams. Two years later, in 2017, when these elections were held again, the SMC had become very active and had started interacting with teachers and even my officers. That year, guardians came forward in big numbers to vote and stand for election to the committee. There were serpentine queues in many schools. That is the strength of a democracy. It was heartening to see this level of participation in the elections to a committee that is probably on the lowest rung in the education infrastructure. In just two years, it gained momentum. I believe that these elections to the management committee and their democratic and

participatory nature will prove to be important milestones in the Delhi education model. The SMC has sixteen members in total, of which twelve are elected from among the guardians of the students. The other members are the principal of the school (as the chairman of the committee), a teacher (as a convenor), an MLA representative and a social worker. Usually, only MLAs become members, but, since on an average there are about twenty to thirty schools in every Vidhan Sabha, it is not possible for MLAs to actively participate in committee meetings, which are held once or twice every month. This was the reason why these representatives were appointed. We also thought it was undemocratic to have the principal as the chairperson of the committee while the MLA was merely a member. This was also the reason why the representatives of the MLAs were included instead of the MLAs themselves. It also ensured that the principals could steer the functioning of the SMC.

As mentioned earlier, the SMC has been crucial in the success of the education model in Delhi. While principals and teachers created a scholastic environment in schools, the SMC members contributed towards improving this environment. Where the environment was not good, if there had been any negligence on the part of the education directorate or school, they tried to rectify it and also kept me informed. I would say that the SMC has acted like a bridge between Delhi government's vision and the situation in schools. This can be understood through a few examples:

- A school in East Delhi had a lot of garbage in it. Allegedly, a PWD contractor had left debris on the premises after some work. Apparently, even after repeated requests by the principal and deputy director, the department had not removed the construction waste. The SMC got its members together, gathered a few young people from the area to participate and cleaned the site.
- In another example, hiring an economics teacher was proving difficult for a school in spite of the education department's efforts. The deputy director could not find one even on contractual basis. The SMC discussed this. They contacted an economics lecturer in Delhi University, who agreed to teach the students of classes 11 and 12 for an entire semester of six months.

Both these incidents are from 2016. The SMC was not authorized and didn't even have the money to hire teachers or resource persons on a temporary basis. There are many examples where, bound by rules, regulations and laws or processes, teachers and principals would lie in wait to get things done by the directorate. It was then that the SMC members came forward and found a solution. I must also add that as an education minister, the SMC acted like my eyes and ears. What was lacking in a school? Which teacher taught well? Or which didn't? Which principal came on time? Who misused his/her position? SMC members often came to me with problems or solutions for these things. Getting new rooms built in schools, providing facilities of many kinds, repairing labs and libraries—these were some of the requests SMC members from thousands of schools came to me with over the last four years. The other big takeaway is that if I need information on any project or plan quickly, I get in touch with the SMC and get it within an hour or two while it usually takes the Directorate of Education a week to ten days to collect the same information. I have selected, on an informal basis, a coordinator for every Vidhan Sabha area. In the same way, for smooth coordination between SMCs in a district, I have appointed a district coordinator. I have made a WhatsApp group of the seventy Vidhan Sabha coordinators and thirteen SMC coordinators on which any SMC-related information or communication can be exchanged. Any work given by me reaches the SMC members of all 1000 schools in a matter of minutes.

The experiences of the last three years motivated us, and we decided to make the SMCs more autonomous. This directive came straight from Arvind Kejriwal. In 2017, we called a meeting at the Indira Gandhi Stadium of all the newly elected SMC members and principals. This was attended by almost 16,000 people. Here, the CM made the announcement that the SMCs would be allocated a fund for hiring teachers in their schools, maintaining buildings or for education-related experiments or activities. This fund would make them autonomous. It took us almost a year to put this into practice. On 9 October 2018, the education department issued the historic order to allocate funding to the SMCs. This was the biggest experiment till date in decentralizing government school administration and management not just in Delhi, but for government school authorities all over the country. No other state has given its SMCs such powers. It won't be wrong to say that this decision was a huge step towards making principals stronger as now their decision-making abilities

included everything required to run a school barring a few things like paying salaries and getting new school buildings constructed. Two months after this order was issued, I held meetings with principals of all the schools in groups of fifty over many days and tried to understand how they had used the power given to them. Almost in all the schools, where there had been a paucity of teachers and no temporary or permanent appointments in spite of the government bringing out regular advertisements, they had managed to make temporary appointments through their SMC funds. I believe that this was the first time in history that all the schools had as many teachers as they needed; be it permanent or appointed through SMC and temporary. Under this rule, the SMC was given the authority to hire someone for 200 hours for a year if there was no permanent teacher.

Other than this, the SMC fund was used by different schools in different ways. In some schools, a trolley to distribute midday meals was organized on the order of the SMC, and in a few others, carts were organized for cleaners to carry garbage to the dumping grounds. Windows that remained broken through chilly Delhi winters were mended. Some schools hired trainers for dance and theatre, while others to tutor students for JEE/CPMT entrance tests.

Every school has stories about the SMCs' contributions. However, there have been instances of differences between the principals and members of SMCs. But these instances are probably few in number, insignificant and not a cause of concern. In most of the schools, principals have been able to bring about a change with the help of these committees. The subjects which were not being taught earlier because of lack of teachers are being taught again because of the temporary appointments. The funding has made these things easier. However, for the first three years, they didn't have this funding. They also didn't have the authority to hire guest teachers but some members would use their contacts and influence to get teachers from other schools or in some cases even professors from universities to teach these subjects. Be it the case of water connection for schools or the anger of guardians on some incident, SMC members have always been there for principals and teachers. In some schools, SMC members have used their contacts to get water coolers, fans, computers, sports equipment, etc., through corporate social responsibility initiatives of companies.

Mega PTM

Another initiative to get the parents involved in the school is the parent–teacher meeting or PTM. On becoming the education minister, I realized that the doors of the schools were usually closed for parents. Except a few principals, most didn't even allow parents to enter the school premises. Most of these parents were uneducated or with a basic level of education and had moved to Delhi from smaller towns to earn a living. For them, getting their children educated or getting them admitted to a school was a big step. Discussing their child's education with teachers and principals was unimaginable to them. I noticed that a few principals still believed in inviting parents sometimes but that was not the case in most schools. I spoke with many students during my surprise visits to the schools. I interacted with guardians, who were waiting at the school gates for their children, and was told that many had not even had the opportunity to even step inside the school premises. In schools where principals wanted to invite them, parents didn't have the time or didn't realize how important it was to meet teachers for their child's education. We decided that at an interval of three months, one day would be fixed for guardians to meet the teachers. We called it 'Mega PTM'. Other than this, on the last few days of every month, schools could fix a date to meet parents but the date of the Mega PTM would be the same in all government schools in Delhi. We made a few special arrangements before the first PTM.

All schools were told to decorate their rooms, gate and gardens before the Mega PTM. NCC cadets or scouts were assigned to stand at the gates to welcome the guardians with folded hands and to give information of their child's class. The guardians were then escorted to the classroom by the scouts where their child's class teacher was waiting for them. The scouts also encouraged them to meet their child's other teachers and the principal. The objective of the Mega PTM was not just to discuss the students' report cards but to make parents familiar with the other aspects of their child's personality as well—what were his/her interests other than studies; what were their health challenges; what was the environment like at home, etc.

We had made arrangements for tea and snacks for the guardians near the gate, so that they could have a cup of tea on their way in or out. Even for this, every school was told to appoint volunteers. All these things might be a trivial matter

for a big, well-established private school but for a government school, this was a big first. We wanted to make the parents feel welcomed and give the impression that we were looking forward to talking to them about their children. The biggest challenge here was getting the guardians to the school. Since many of them were uneducated, they were unsure what they would talk to the teachers about. For many others, taking a day or half a day off was difficult. Many guardians didn't have good memories of their time in school. We were unsure if they would attend the Mega PTM at the behest of their children. There was also the fact that many children would not want to call their parents to the school for various reasons. There was a possibility that they might not even inform them. So, we made a plan to motivate and invite the parents through various means.

First, we made daily announcements during the morning assemblies that all children had to inform their parents of the date of the Mega PTM and made sure they came to the school. We started sending out text messages two days before the PTM to guardians whose numbers we had in our records. SMC members were also told to meet parents in the colonies nearby and apprise them of the importance of the Mega PTM and request them personally to attend it. Half page advertisements were also put in newspapers but the most important role was played by radio adverts. Advertisements with appeals by children were recorded. I made an appeal too in it as the Education Minister and ran them for a week on all FM channels in Delhi constantly. The result of all these efforts was that there was a discussion all over Delhi that government schools were organizing a mega PTM and parents were being requested to attend through radio advertisements. People who were well-off and had children in private schools heard these advertisements and informed their staff members, whose children were in government schools, of its importance. Not just that, they even gave them half-days and encouraged them to attend the PTM. I say this with such certainty because many people wrote about the Mega PTM on Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites and shared the experiences of their drivers, guards, peons and domestic help from the first evening of the Mega PTM till the next few days. This was quite interesting.

Atishi and I visited different schools from the first morning of the first Mega PTM. We covered schools in Patparganj and Lakshmi Nagar. We were happy to see that in spite of a drizzle, children were seen walking to their schools with their parents. We also liked the arrangements that had been made to help parents

their parents. We also liked the arrangements that had been made to help parents and promote discussions. Initially, we thought that the parents would not be able to come in big numbers because of the rains. It was around then that we were crossing a main road in Krishna Nagar and saw a long queue in a lane. We saw the board of a government school far into the lane. At first, we couldn't believe this queue was of parents who had come to attend the Mega PTM, but when we got out of the car and walked into the lane, we realized that to be the fact. When we went inside the school, we found that there was a desk right at the gate from where students and a few teachers were directing parents to the designated classrooms. The constant stream of visiting parents had made the queue outside swell to almost 400 people. This was a happy experience for all of us. As soon as pictures of this queue were put up on social media, TV and print media picked up the story. It almost looked like a queue of voters on election day. We went to a few other schools and by the evening, we had visited some seventeen to eighteen schools in two batches. There were many schools among these that I was visiting for the first time. The enthusiasm and active participation of principals and teachers in the Mega PTM assured me that this was a successful experiment.

I always quote an incident from the first Mega PTM. On seeing parents and teachers conversing while passing through a corridor in a school, I would sometimes enter the classroom. In one room, a young teacher was discussing the education of a student with his/her parents very patiently. Other parents were also present. I quietly went and sat on a bench at the back. When their conversation got over, the teacher saw me and got teary-eyed. She said, 'Sir, you have opened the eyes of teachers by organizing the Mega PTM. You have also changed our thought process.' When I pressed for more details, she told me that the child of the parents she was talking to was weak in studies, and she had always assumed that the parents were negligent and never paid attention to their child's education. On talking to them, she realized that they left home between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. every day to wash the cars of rich people or do some other cleaning work. After this, they went to the vegetable market between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. to buy their daily stock and sold this all day on *thela*s. After knowing all this, she realized how difficult it was for parents who left home at an unearthly hour and were themselves uneducated to pay attention to their child's education. 'It is the responsibility of us teachers. We get paid for doing it. We have to take

care of their child's education. Our eyes have opened today.' The teacher's eyes shone as she said this. Maybe other teachers experienced this too that day. My belief is that the Mega PTM broke the wall separating parents and teachers. Whichever school I went to, there was an atmosphere of festivity and celebration. I still remember that on almost all the streets, I could see children taking their parents to school that day.

After this, the Mega PTM was organized after every three to four months. The dates were decided well in advance. Parents were informed through their children, the SMC, newspapers and radio. I paid surprise visits to schools in different areas every time and found the atmosphere of festivity every time—children walking hand in hand with their parents. I have seen students talking about the Mega PTM in the morning assembly. There has been an increase in the trust between schools and parents. I have asked students about the benefits of the Mega PTM. They have admitted that there has been a change in their parents since the Mega PTMs started. The most remarkable example was narrated by a girl in the morning assembly of Khichdipur School. On being asked whether the Mega PTMs had made any difference to their lives, this child stood up and said, 'My mother would always ask me to do housework. I wanted to study but she would insist that I help her out. When she came for the Mega PTM, our teacher told her that I am a good student. After that, she started telling me to focus on studies, study well and that she would handle the housework.' This is a big change and maybe a big step in building cooperation between parents and government schools to help improve the future of their child.

EDUCATION AS A FOUNDATION

The ‘Education Model of Coexistence’: Jeevan Vidya Shivir

I visited a school at Patparganj village the day after swearing-in as the education minister of Delhi. This was my first surprise inspection.

I found the doors and windows broken, fans broken and electrical wires dangling. I asked the principal about the condition of the school, to which he replied, ‘Sir, as you know, most of the students come from the slums out back. They spoil everything. You must know what kind of children come here.’ With this one answer, I caught the pulse of the disease. It is this attitude towards underprivileged children and their social and economic environment that has made the school system fail. We have taken the responsibility to educate these children, but we complain about them and say they aren’t up to it. That means that only if the children were intelligent and came from an intelligent environment, would we give them an intelligent education. What we don’t understand is that we too can work towards creating an intelligent society through education. But what can be done? This is the root cause of the problem. While we have to find a solution, we cry over the problem being a problem. This was my first lesson as the education minister. I understood that while getting the doors and windows fixed was one task, reorienting the approach of educators was more important. Reforming the education system of Delhi and creating a new society through education was my mission as the education minister.

To achieve this, I needed a team and nothing could be better than one made up of officials of the education department because they had both the authority and the experience. However, they lacked initiative and direction. From the initial meetings at the Delhi secretariat and my surprise inspections at schools, these officials realized how serious we were about education. We weren’t just interested in dusting off the rusted structures but getting them on track and making them run smoothly. That was the mission of the Aam Aadmi Party

government. My first challenge was to present a blueprint for future plans to all my officers, from senior ones in the education department to those at the district and zonal level. This was done to have a frank and open chat with them and help them understand the importance of all the structures and systems around education; to explain what was lacking in the education we were offering and in which direction and how to progress in the next five years.

To me, the only solution for all these challenges seemed to be the 'Jeevan Vidya Shivir' (Life Education workshop), which is based on the 'Madhyastha Darshan' (coexistence) model inspired by education-philosopher, A. Nagraj. As soon as I was sworn in as the education minister on 14 February 2015, I contacted my old friend Som Tyagi who had been working on the 'Madhyastha Darshan' based education system in Chhattisgarh and many other states and asked him for help. Owing to health problems, Som Tyagi had been confined to Raipur for some time. He had also not organized any workshops in this time. However, he couldn't turn down my request, and on 14 March 2015, we invited all the education department officials, university chancellors, etc., for a day to the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) headquarters in Defence Colony, Delhi. This was done to understand our aim vis-à-vis education—our aspirations, the purpose we had in mind and to pinpoint the gaps. We also had to understand how far behind in practice we were even from the half-baked aspirations that were set earlier. The aim of this day-long workshop was not just to summarize but to present these aspirations in a meaningful way and examine the shortcomings of the current system. We had a long discussion on these subjects. Organizing a day-long workshop on such a vast topic and with so many high-ranking officials was no mean feat. During the course of the discussion, we realized that all the attendees had noticed the shortcomings in the traditional way of imparting education. I was present throughout and suggested that they participate in an eight-day Jeevan Vidya Workshop for further discussions. A residential workshop outside Delhi seemed like a good option. The entire education department landed at Abhyuday Sansthan in Achoti village, 24 km from Raipur, in the very first week of April. Including me, we were a total of fifty people—the education secretary, education director, regional director, deputy director, zonal director, SCERT officials, university vice chancellors, directors and officers of the Department of Higher Education and Department of Technical Education

Department of Technical Education.

This was a unique experiment in governance—a newly appointed education minister with his team members from the education department on an eight-day workshop away from the daily rigmarole, in a village away from their city, discussing how education could and through education, the country and society could progress along the path of development. It was a new experience for the officials and especially for those from the education department whose entire teams, branches, departments, junior to senior, stayed together for eight days. The discussion was only around education—from the time they woke up, had breakfast, all day long and then at the dinner table, till they slept. They had no other work for those eight days. Freed from their everyday chores, they were present at the workshop not just physically but mentally too.

I am sure you'd want to know what the discussion was on. If I were to put it in one sentence, I would say it was a discussion on the model of education that would inculcate the concept of coexistence among students. What is this model? To understand that, you will have to participate in the workshop at Jeevan Vidya Shivir. I cannot explain it in a few words but to quell your curiosity, all I can say is that the current model of education is competitive, where every student is taught that the biggest proof of their learning is their ability to race ahead, leaving all their classmates behind. On paper, we are giving education in classrooms but in reality, these are war rooms. This is the reason why every child is put in the rat race to leave the others behind. And after school, he/she is stuck in this race. In this model, either every person is working under someone or trying to get someone else to work under them. Here the basis for progress is conflict or exploitation. There is no scope to make it wholesome or to coexist. This is a model to raise children for the market to develop human resource. That is probably the reason why in our country we do not have an education ministry but education is looked after by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The other state education departments in the country also suffer from the same malady. There too, in the name of education, men and women are being raised as resources.

Resource being used as a tool: The problem with tools is that they don't have a vision of their own. They can only be of use to someone. They don't have an understanding of good or bad. Tools can be put to any use. They can't express themselves. They can only be used. This in spite of the fact that expression is

what makes us human. To express is to be human. What I am trying to say here is that being a tool or being skilled is just a part of their personality but being human who can live with reason and sensitivity is a greater virtue. A child wants to grow up to become a human being but we think our job is to just turn him into a tool in the name of education.

In the coexistence model, it is important to develop a child's thought processes. Being a resource is just a part of his personality. The element of competition is there in this model too but it is not about leaving others behind to make a name for self. That is because the competition is not with others but with the self. In the coexistence model, competition means increasing the usefulness of oneself: 'We knew a lot yesterday but we will know more today. We will do better than yesterday.' This means you compete with yourself and be inspired to better yourself, which is the basis for progress. The purpose of competition in the coexistence model is for our continued well-being, while the 'HRD-based progress' model is based on deriving happiness from being more successful compared to others or getting sad if others do better than you. The latter one is based on a matrix of exploitation and mistreating others around you as resources. On the other hand, the coexistence model is based on working in tandem with people around you and utilizing resources. This explanation might sound a bit philosophical but is important to understand to reimagine the aim of education. It is important to understand the aim. The eight-day stay and discussions at Raipur were based on this. The discussion was anecdotal and informal. The main point of the discussion was: 'A child enters the realm of education when he/she is three to four years of age and stays in that realm for another twenty years. During this time, their parents, teachers, the education system and society surround them from all sides. And what we need from him/her at the end of this twenty-year-long journey needs to be decided.' In the education model of coexistence, there is a detailed discussion on the minimum that one can expect from a person after almost twenty years of education:

1. That he/she has self-confidence
2. That he/she stays healthy
3. That he/she lives with family with prosperity (overall satisfaction in the family)
4. That he/she has amicability in relationships (a family without

complaints)

5. That he/she contributes to society, so that there is no terror, violence, fear and instability on earth.

If you look at the words above, you'll find them to be simple. All of us feel that the current education model is working just fine but if we dig deeper into each and every word and try to understand it, discuss it, then slowly and gradually we understand that in some ways, we are moving in the opposite direction.

Let's take the example of self-confidence. When we talk about it, we find that we have faith in others but not in the self, meaning it is comparative. I study and there is only one way to assess how much I have understood—by giving exams and seeing how well I have scored in comparison to others. We might understand something well and very deeply but the assessment of our understanding doesn't come from us but is derived as a reaction from others. The kind of house we live in, the kind of jobs we do, the kind of clothes we wear, the kind of food we eat, the locality we live in, the luxuries we have. We don't derive happiness from these things but from comparing them with what our friends, relatives and neighbours have. Is this self-confidence or belief in others or lack of faith in the self?

Our behaviour, restlessness, anger, fear are all dependent on the behaviour of others, which decides whether we are calm or unsettled. Others' success or failure decides the parameters of our success and failure. The material well-being of others decides the basis of our material wealth. Nothing of ours depends on us. Then how will we become self-reliant? Behaviour, responsibility and demeanour based on that of others is a sign of low self-confidence. Twenty years of education does not make us capable of living a happy life on the strength of our knowledge, our understanding, our skills. This creates a lack of self-confidence. Confidence born out of competition with others can never give you confidence.

Children have to have faith in themselves. Faith in self means understanding the usefulness of oneself to have faith in life.

In the same way, twenty years of education does not equip one to live a healthy life. It only equips us to barely keep the body functioning through medical treatment. We have left the questions such as what we eat, how much we drink, how we use our body and where to the market. The more educated one

is, the more dependent they are on the market. People in the market decide what we eat, where we live, and when there are diseases owing to what we eat or where we live, how we seek medical attention to treat them depending on how profitable each option is for them. If you don't believe, then look at the educated people around you and decide whether they are equipped to live a healthy life or not. Are they successful in maintaining a healthy lifestyle on the strength of the twenty years of education? You might come across one among hundreds or thousands but if it is because of education, it will be true only if every educated person is able to live thus. Every educated person, unless having met with an accident, should be healthy.

Living with family in prosperity: We have to understand the sentiment behind the word 'prosperity'. It needs to be understood in the context of three other words:

1. Poverty
2. Wealth
3. Prosperity

Poverty: Poverty means being without facilities; a deprived and poor person.

Wealth: Being wealthy means having facilities. A wealthy person has money, facilities, even luxuries, but he/she is not at peace and is fearful. This lack of peace doesn't let one enjoy the luxuries around them. In the Jeevan Vidya Shivir, much stress is laid upon one line, 'A man can become as rich as he wants but the neighbour's car and clothes will always make him poor.'

Prosperity: Prosperity means just one thing—the one who has all the means and is living happily too; the one who lives with the feeling that he/she isn't lacking in anything. He/she lacks only lack. We look around us and find very few people who even after twenty years of education, in spite of being surrounded by all kinds of amenities, are in lack of lack.

Living amicably with relatives: The current education system doesn't teach us to appreciate relationships, it rather teaches one to evaluate them. How profitable a relative is. That is the reason why instead of living amicably with relatives, there

is only dissatisfaction. ‘Amicability’ makes both the giver and the recipient happy. As of now, the giver fills up with pride while the recipient gets poorer. This equation of pride and poverty creates a clash at some point or the other.

Contributing to society: A healthy body, a self-confident mind and amicability in relationships settle the self and enable one to contribute to the larger order in terms of family, society, nation, world and nature. However, if we look around, we find that educated people are unsettled and spread disharmony. One man makes arms for profit; another uses those arms to exploit others. The one getting exploited in return exploits someone else. The aim of an educated person, in the current model of education, is to get ahead in life. But they don’t have the ability to participate in society in a meaningful way. They only participate in creating disharmony because they don’t have an understanding of amicability or responsibility. The knowledge of an educated person is based on the ability to exploit others. The ability of senior managers is assessed on the basis of how many people they can replace with computers or on their skills to increase the company’s profits.

Had there been an understanding of society, as the number of literates increased, the attacks on the natural world would not have increased. Today, all courts are bursting at the seams with cases, and the number of discord-creators is increasing as compared to peacekeepers.

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion from the above statements that the current education system has no benefits. A lot of benefits have been reaped from it. Modern technological work, the study of atoms, elements and protons, the study of their relation with each other and their use to the exchange of information in the cyberspace, invention of mobile phones and modern aeroplanes—such marvels have been possible only because of education. It has also altered a lot of beliefs and systems, such as the change in the society’s perception of women, access to facilities, such as technology, for certain castes and religions. Rules about caste-based access and use of facilities have been done away with only because of education. Wherever these customs are still followed, there is a possibility that education will put an end to them in the near future. Evil practices such as bonded labour have been scrapped because of the current education model, and today, slavery has no place in society. That is what

the education system has given us. The analysis of all that has been said above is that the need of the hour is to understand the aims and shortcomings of the current education system and address them. That is the reason I say that in spite of all its faults, the education system has contributed a lot to our society and the world, but there are many problems that have cropped up because of this model as well. If we have to understand them, we have to start by understanding the true aim of education and try to put the country on the path it should be on.

Let's discuss the three big problems with the current education model. One big and important point that was brought up during the coexistence-based workshop (Jeevan Vidya Shivir), and even in our later discussions, was that the three big shortcomings in education have come up because of an incorrect interpretation of certain threads in economics, sociology and psychology. Because of this misinterpretation, the meaning has been twisted and the twenty years of education, instead of being positive, has only had a negative impact on family, society, country and environment.

In economics, Adam Smith's words—limited resources and unlimited wants—have proven lethal. Regardless of the context, these words have left an everlasting impression on the mind of an average literate person, someone who has had twenty years of regular education. Even if we have not studied economics formally, this thought can create doubts in the mind of any person. It then becomes valid for this person to gather unlimited resources for his/her unlimited wants.

In the course of one's education, at no level is this question asked: Are wants really unlimited? There has not even been an attempt to draw up a list of wants to understand them in any college or school. That is the reason why every person is convinced that their wants are unlimited. To fulfil these unlimited wants, he gets into the rat race to collect unlimited wealth. It is a proven fact that nobody can collect unlimited resources or wealth just through hard work or honesty. For that, he has to adopt dishonest ways—cheat and exploit people. It is certain that when this happens, the person on whom this dishonesty is unleashed, who is cheated on, who is exploited, will not stay quiet. As a reaction, he will either exploit someone else or will protest. In both situations, there will be discord, tension, war and natural disasters. So, if Adam Smith's words are true then we have to accept that exploitation, discord and war are the way forward. But we are not willing to accept that.

not willing to accept that.

To understand this thought of Adam Smith's, we need to examine each and every aspect of it and we have to see whether wants are really unlimited. Are some wants limited and some unlimited? Can man's wants of food, clothing, house, car, mobile phone, TV, etc., not be counted? How much bread, how much clothing, how many houses, how many TVs, how many mobiles would one need in 100 years? Are they unlimited? Are there any boundaries to it and if there are any, then how are they unlimited? Is it our emotional needs that are unlimited? That we understand in terms of words such as respect, security, love. These are also not unlimited but continuous wants. Then, why does this illusion exist? Is it because we usually look for happiness in respect and facilities. Is it possible to identify your needs, understand and get the ability to fulfil them through education? Is it possible to fulfil countable needs through the available means and understand unlimited or continuous needs and fulfil them through education? If not, then what is the use of this education? Is it not important to fix this economic structure to end atrocities and war?

The principle of evolutionary studies: The father of evolutionary studies, Darwin propounded the idea of, 'survival of the fittest.' This principle gives rise to a never-ending competition. It creates fear and apprehension. And the fearful person gets busy hoarding everything, person or facility at hand. This is because he fears that if he has to survive, he has to be the fittest. To be the fittest, he can either start working towards becoming the fittest or ensure that nobody else is.

In the same vein, the father of psychology, Freud said that desire was the motive behind all of man's actions. This also creates an illusion. It makes people consciously or unconsciously slaves of their desires. And then all of society knowingly or unknowingly starts working around this theory. Today, all market practices are based on this theory of desire. No advertisement is complete without a dash of desire, be it to sell a bottle of mango juice, undergarments or perfume.

These three principles of economics, evolutionary thought and psychology get embedded in the minds of those pursuing education even if they don't study them. In such a situation, it is the responsibility of education to scientifically uproot these three theories from the minds of people. And this needs to be done by education alone. Every child can try and understand his/her own mind during his/her education. They can weigh and choose all aspects of the education that

they are receiving. They can understand their gains and losses. They can understand justice, truth and duty.

It is possible for a student to understand his/her inner composition, the composition of family, the composition of society, the composition of nature and, finally, the composition of the self through education. They can participate in these structures if they understand them well. Otherwise, they'll be hunted by these structures and there will be more chaos. It is important to do so to live a happy life. This is the coexistence model of education, which helps one understand the difference between having a life and living and becoming a part of education and life.

Educated people should be able to understand their relationship with each other and build a relationship not just among themselves but with their family members, society and every aspect of nature. With the understanding of these relationships, they will start valuing other people, every aspect of nature and themselves. They will understand the difference between price and value. They will understand science and nature, not to exploit them but to develop them for the betterment of the society. They will learn to coexist with nature—not to dominate it but to utilize it. This skill can be taught in the course of education. Twenty years is a long time.

Under the coexistence model, education for a future generation of engineers, doctors, traders, administrators will be given. This is not some idealistic dream but premised on the utilization of literature; utilization of mathematics and science; of geography and history. It is about developing such an education plan. The inspiration behind the coexistence model is late A. Nagraj who lived a fulfilling life as a physician, a merchant and a farmer and gave us this vision. I gained this understanding after meeting Nagraj. That is when I began understanding that there are a lot of issues that we are trying to resolve through laws and protests but their solution can be found in education. As of now, we have limited the aim of education to removing poverty and providing jobs. This is a worldwide problem.

The world over, education is imparted with the aim that after twenty years, every person can earn enough to feed themselves but the role of education in global and national institutions is very secondary. Here the importance of education has been greatly underestimated. When we talk about world peace or global warming or ending wars, we think that governments or armed forces or

science will achieve these aims. Numerous laws have been made, arms have been deployed and technology has been applied to end terrorism, but we never ask if education can be used to stop it? We never ask why we are not being able to stop global warming in spite of numerous protocols and alliances. Can education help? Can it make the earth liveable and teach coming generations how to live in harmony with nature? We have enacted many laws across the world to remove ethnic conflicts, wars, violence and hatred but does education have the ability to shape people in such a way that after twenty years, when they step out into the world, they don't hate anyone because of their caste or religion? I think only education can achieve this. All we have to do is look for solutions at national and international levels in education. The day we hand over this responsibility to education, teachers will be able to achieve these aims.

A long discussion on and review of all these subjects took place in those eight days. We also meditated on what we could do. Where did the curriculum fall short? What could we add to it and what could we remove? All these aspects were openly discussed. I won't say that after four and a half years, we have been successful in achieving all the goals that were discussed during that time, but I would definitely say that this was deeply ingrained into the minds of many officials of the education department. They understood that the aim of education could be much bigger than removing poverty and providing employment and the role of teachers was not to merely transfer the knowledge of the previous generations to the next. Four years is too short a time for all that we had set out to achieve. And that too taking our current situation into consideration. Before taking the next step, we took cognizance of ground realities such as ascertaining that children came to school, teachers were in school, the school was neat and clean, there were no cobwebs in classrooms, washrooms and drinking water taps were in order, and there were proper desks to sit on; that when a teacher came to a classroom, the blackboard/whiteboard was in such a good condition that whatever was written on it could be read even by the students sitting at the back. We took these matters as the baseline and then discussed the path to be taken in those eight days. We discussed the doubling of the education budget in the first year and spending 25–26 per cent of the overall budget every year on education, building modern facilities in schools, making buildings clean, training teachers, modifying the examination pattern, reducing the syllabus by one fourth,

promoting music and sports, promoting labs and libraries, starting the happiness class and entrepreneurship mindset curriculum (EMC), etc. There are many such efforts whose blueprint, if not in tangible form, was conceived in that workshop, at Jeevan Vidya Shivir. This eight-day camp was a beginning in itself and I understand that it played a very big role in shaping the present model of education in Delhi.

Happiness Class: Understanding Emotions

The happiness class has had such a spectacular impact in Delhi that it has created a nationwide curiosity. People want to know what this model is that is being run for almost 8 lakh students for one period every day. How is happiness being taught like maths and science? Is it possible to make children happy by teaching them happiness like a regular subject? Can it create a mindset in students to make them more positive and creative? What have the results been? It is too early to answer these questions as this curriculum is merely a year old. Only time will tell. However, initial results were as interesting as these questions. When I go to schools and talk to principals or teachers of classes—from nursery to class 8—they always comment on how this programme has changed the behaviour of students in just one year. This is true especially of students of classes 6 to 8, as it has been noted that their aggression has gone down and they are calmer. Some teachers even say that the level of concentration has increased in students of this age group. Here are some of the most interesting anecdotes:

- The mother of one of our students told a teacher that her child has become very understanding at home. Before eating food, he asks his mother if there's any for her. Sometimes he even checks in the kitchen to see if there really is food left for the mother or if she is lying to feed her children.
- A grandmother told us that she has seen a tremendous change in her grandchild in the last one year. According to her, the child, who used to fight with the other children in the neighbourhood, has changed and he shows them a lot of love and respect.
- Recently, a reporter from a well-known newspaper went to a school for a story. He asked the students whether they talk about the programme at

home. A student told him that one evening when his father came home dejected, he conducted a session of the happiness class at home as he thought that it would calm his father.

- One incident I can't forget is when a girl told me about how the happiness classes had given her peace of mind from the strife at home because of her being a girl. She told us that her brother, being a boy, was sent to a private school while she was sent to a government one. Not just that, in school, she would often stew with resentment because of the favouritism shown to her brother at the breakfast table. Since the happiness class started, she has been able to leave her resentment behind in the very first period. It helps her focus on her studies. It is saddening that this discrimination is happening even in the capital of the country but it brings me joy that the happiness class is bringing some respite.

The seeds of the happiness class were sown in a conversation between Arvind Kejriwal and me. I still remember that we were in his drawing room, discussing a few things related to the education department. He interrupted me and said, 'Buildings have become better, teachers are being trained and their self-confidence is also increasing. As a result, exam results have also been improving but before getting into politics, we always used to talk about making children better human beings, why is nothing is being done on that front?' What he said was true. All our focus had been on repairing buildings, reinvigorating teachers and improving results. We were doing nothing to make our students better human beings. This thought stayed with me and probably, subconsciously, I decided to work in this area. We conducted many Jeevan Vidya workshops for our teachers and even sent them for Vipassana courses but students were not involved in these initiatives. All our focus was on teachers and we were all ganging up to turn the children into bookworms. We didn't have any Vipassana or Jeevan Vidya workshops for the children. The CM's question had got me thinking. I mulled over his words even while performing my daily duties. I thought up the framework for the happiness class during a ten-day Vipassana course that I had attended. I would like to mention here that there was no access to pen and paper, and talking over the phone, in fact, talking in these ten days was also prohibited. This is why I could make notes only in my mind. The biggest inspiration for the happiness class came from the coexistence-based

Jeevan Vidya workshop, which looks at all the aspects of education and life very critically and discusses it very scientifically.

Let me state outright what the happiness class is not. There are no moral science lessons in this curriculum. It doesn't involve any activities that would get children excited for some time. There's no chanting or praying. A joint team of twenty Delhi government teachers, District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) lecturers and principals, some reputed individuals and organizations working in the area of child psychology created the content for the happiness class. It's based on the principle of the self-confidence building mode of education based on the coexistence model. What was also studied during its conception was why the adoption of the leadership-oriented system of education was not making people happy. Where had we failed in our efforts? After considering and deliberating on these points, this curriculum was prepared. We took the help of scholars and researchers working on different aspects of an education that builds a positive culture in the country. The curriculum is based on Indian thought and education in which we have merged science.

The three main aspects of the happiness class are:

1. Mindfulness meditation
2. Inspirational stories to make children responsible and mature
3. Activity-oriented discussions where children study their own thoughts and reactions scientifically.

Let me explain them:

1. Mindfulness meditation: Maybe because the framework of the happiness class was created during a Vipassana course, its most important aspect is mindful meditation which helps children hone their focus. The first five minutes and last two minutes are devoted to meditation. Once a week, usually on Mondays, in the entire forty-five minutes of the happiness classes, some small mindfulness-related exercises are conducted and then students discuss their experiences of it. These discussions are always very interesting and children take a lot of interest in understanding their experiences.

   In these activities, children are told that when they sit, study, hear

anything, write anything, eat or drink anything, they should do it with full attention. Initially, children are trained to close their eyes and listen carefully to the sounds around them. Gradually, students learn to focus on their breathing, heartbeat and other parts of their bodies. With practice, students learn to pay attention to the reaction in their bodies while eating, drinking or walking. With experience, children start to analyse their thoughts. They realize that their thoughts stem from wrongdoing in the past or present struggles or worry about the future. Children are trained to not analyse their thoughts but just to focus on how they enter their minds and how they leave on their own. Slowly but surely, students learn to focus on sounds surrounding them, the working of their bodies, and the thoughts entering and leaving their minds without unsettling them. They basically learn to pay full attention to whatever they are doing. Their attention never wavers while talking or listening to someone. When they study, they only focus on studying. In class, they focus only on the lesson or the discussion. In a way, they learn to live in the present. Not living in the present is the biggest reason for our worries and failures.

This kind of meditation is not about remembering a mantra, god or place or an incident and focusing on that memory. In the traditional Indian knowledge system, more importance is given to the act of mindful reading than memory. Through mindfulness, children learn to focus on the goings-on in their bodies and the reactions and thoughts in their minds. These reactions and thoughts can often be distracting. Through mindful meditation, a child gains the ability to see, analyse and understand the different reactions and thoughts in different situations. This practice of focusing helps a child become centred and, as a result, they can focus on their work and behaviour and improve their interpersonal relationships in the classroom and at home.

Mindful meditation is an ancient Indian tradition that runs deeper than any present religious or spiritual rituals or practices. It is being adopted all over the world, especially in the West. The knowledge system that the West is so in awe of is rooted in mindful meditation. Many schools abroad have adopted this Indian invention to improve the level of concentration in their students so that they are able to understand their

subjects in depth. This is the reason why mindful meditation is now an integral and well-loved part of the curriculum in many schools in the West. Happiness class was introduced in Delhi schools in July 2018 and just in three to four months, we received positive results. During my discussions with teachers, they have always said that mindful meditation is their favourite part. Many a time, just to gauge their reaction, I have said that if children and teachers find these classes an extra burden, they can be stopped. But they have always maintained that regular practice of mindful meditation has brought about a huge change in children. Children have said that they feel calmer and are less distracted and can focus better on their studies. Even their anger and irritation have dissipated. Just in a few months since the inception of this programme, teachers and principals had examples to share about its impact.

2. Inspirational stories: Let me say at the outset that these stories are not for inculcating moral values. They don't teach one to not lie or to be well-behaved or give an understanding of right or wrong. These stories are not about giving children an ideal or a yardstick. These are very short stories that show the mindset of an average person in a special situation. Through these examples, children are taught how to reflect on their own thoughts in similar situations.

    These stories show children, who through mindful meditation have become aware of their surroundings and selves, how to understand their thoughts and reactions. They help them identify what is right and what is wrong. The stories have been curated with these objectives in mind. The aim is not to be pedantic, but to develop the emotional quotient of children through examples. The stories help the students understand their own mindset. The stories themselves are not important. What is important is the discussion after every story. The stories are told in four to six minutes but the discussions go on for days. Children identify situations in their lives similar to those in the stories and discuss them. There are stories such as 'Three Labourers, Three Perspectives'. In this story, one man interacts with three construction workers and asks them what they are doing. The first worker answers that he is breaking stones. The second says that he is trying to earn a living. The third says that he is working to build a school. Children will study if there's a school. These

working to build a school. Children will study if there's a school. These are three people doing the same work, drawing the same wages, but their answers are different and these delineate their mentality. When we do any work, we are in one of the three mindsets. The story is short and ends with the third worker's answer but this is where the discussion begins. They draw parallels with their lives and compare the situations to understand their mindset at the time. We don't say anything idealistic to the children. We don't even try to tell them which mindset is good and which is bad. What we try to explain in a very positive way is how people are in different frames of mind while doing different things. Once a child begins to understand his mindset, he can accomplish even the most difficult tasks, he is never unhappy and even if he does something with difficulty, he is mindful of his contribution. The discussion on this short story goes on for days till every child in the class has shared his/her perspective.

Another story is 'Brother Is Not a Burden'. In this story, a little girl is climbing up a mountain with her brother on her back. A sensitive man, on seeing the girl work so hard, tells her that she must be tired, and offers to carry the brother for a while. The girl replies saying that he is her brother, not a burden. 'I might be tired, but I don't consider him a burden,' she says. This story is also an example of the different frames of mind in terms of familial relations at different times. These days, a lot of people consider their parents a burden once they become independent and start living their own lives. Not just parents, even other relationships where their help and support are required can cause discord. This is a sign that subconsciously we consider these relationships a burden. If at an early age children understand that relationships are not a burden, they will value them. Especially in situations where people continue to maintain relationships in spite of considering them a burden out of a sense of responsibility or societal expectations.

'The Rich Man' is another such story. In this, a child asks his father for an expensive gift. When the father can't get it because of financial constraints, the child is filled with negative emotions for the father. He even steals his father's wallet and runs away from home. When he goes through the contents in his father's wallets, he realizes that his father has

no money. He realizes his mistake. This is an everyday example from families around us. When children discuss this story, they often reflect on their reasons for not obeying their parents. They analyse their relationships with their parents.

3. Activities: Like stories, a lot of activities are also an integral part of the happiness class. Here too the aim is to help children analyse, understand and evaluate their thought processes. There is no moral to be learnt. Children are encouraged to look within and understand the reactions and thoughts that arise during the activities. It helps them build an opinion and make decisions when they are in situations similar to that in the activities.

   The activities are created keeping in mind the age groups. An important activity in class 8 is to understand one's needs. It helps them assess how relevant the idea of 'unlimited wants and limited resources' is to their experiences. After the activity the children understand that they have wants of many kinds—material needs such as food, clothing, housing, mobile phones, cars, etc., and emotional needs such as love, respect, security, happiness, etc. Children make a list of these needs and then classify them as material or emotional. They also understand that material needs can be met through hard work while emotional needs are met through good interpersonal relationships. The most important part of this activity—which goes on for many days—is that children understand that both their material and emotional needs are limited and can be fulfilled. However, when we try to fulfil emotional needs through material goods, we fall into the trap of thinking that in spite of unlimited things, our emotional needs are not getting fulfilled. This confusion is what gives rise to the idea 'unlimited needs and limited resources'. Through this activity, we also make children analyse their actions. For example, while buying something, they are made to think whether they need it or it is something they are doing to show off.

   Another important activity is about trust. In this, students discuss their trust in others and themselves. It helps them understand how one's trust in the self is continuous and the trust in others or the trust born out of external things is comparative and ever-lasting. Many activities are also performed to inculcate a sense of gratitude in children towards cleaners

performed to inculcate a sense of gratitude in children towards cleaners, gatekeepers, parents and vendors.

This is how mindfulness meditation, stories and activities have been included in the curriculum. All three have the same objective—to make children introspective. They help them look analytically at their own behaviour, thoughts and reactions. As mentioned earlier, this is a purely scientific syllabus that helps children resolve their dilemmas and become emotionally strong and determined human beings.

Incidentally, when this syllabus was being prepared, I had gone to Harvard University to deliver a lecture. I met the teacher training specialist, Mitalene Fletcher, who is the director of PreK-12 and other international programmes at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I told her about Delhi government's plans and experiments. I wanted to see if we could get some examples and contacts at the international level. That would make our work simpler. She gave examples from many countries. But she admitted that, as far as she knew, this was the first time a programme like this was being planned in Delhi.

Since then Nepal, Afghanistan and Washington have also expressed an interest in understanding this syllabus, and closer home, private schools have also talked about adopting this curriculum. It is not that bringing these efforts to fruition was without roadblocks. To make teachers understand the meaning of this curriculum so that they could teach it properly to students was the biggest challenge. I still remember that during inspection, I saw a teacher making his students close their eyes and chant a few mantras in the name of mindful meditation. These situations come about because in our system teachers have also been trained to promote rote learning. We have to subvert this age-old conditioning and teach them something new.

In my opinion, there are two aims of education—to make people learn the ability to live happily and to help others live happily. That is what the ultimate aim of education, from nursery to college, is. When I say this, I am often asked if science, geography, history, literature aim to lead to happiness then why have the happiness class? The aim of the happiness class is to understand happiness. What is the meaning of happiness for our students at the present and in their future life? What does living happily with others mean? Can happiness be measured? Can happiness be compared? What is the science of happiness gained from comparing with others and happiness elicited from within? Is happiness

from comparing with others and happiness elicited from within? Is happiness synonymous with materialistic things? Answering these and similar questions scientifically after looking within and at your surroundings is what the happiness class is.

Let me mention another interesting incident related to the happiness programme. I participated in the International Education Conference in Moscow in September 2017 where education ministers from forty-five countries had been invited to speak on education reforms, techniques and other aspects of education. I noted that most of the discussions were focused on the use of technology in classrooms. In my introduction, I requested that since education ministers from these countries were present there, could we think about how we could possibly look at resolving problems through education rather than solving them through strict laws and force. Could the education ministers of forty-five countries think of ways to end terrorism and global warming that have not been resolved in spite of these efforts and make the world a better place for humans and nature? For the next two days, almost all ministers came and spoke with me informally and said that what I was saying was right but how could terrorism be ended with education. I assured them that it was possible and the solution could be found in ancient Indian wisdom.

As luck would have it, I participated in the international conference in Moscow again in December 2018 where I shared my experiments with and experiences of the happiness class. This time, education ministers from seventy countries had been invited to talk. Many countries showed an interest in the curriculum and have kept in touch. The Moscow incident is important to show that at a time when India is dealing with all these issues, it is possible to look for solutions to them in the happiness class. It has shown how these manmade disasters can be averted through education. I have said many a time that education is not about making buildings or modern classrooms or adopting technology in classrooms. These are its needs but not its achievements. Education’s biggest achievement is that it can foresee future problems, find solutions and prepare future generations for them. To me, the happiness class is a big and important step in this direction. There have been well-being, school and leadership education experiments across the world. Happiness classes have been organized too but their scope has been limited. These are usually limited to students in just a few schools. They mostly run for a month or for one or two

classes in one month. Organizing happiness classes from nursery to class 8 for one year every day across 1000 schools, for 8 lakh students by 20,000 teachers is a large-scale project. From a spiritual point of view, 8 lakh students do mindful meditation for five minutes every day. Even thinking about the knowledge emerging from its positive energy is exciting.

Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum: Getting Future Ready

Every child deserves to go to school. Every child has the right to education. However, education does not mean simply creating a generation of youngsters with certificates in their hands. If the aim of school education is about raising employable children, then it should also prepare children to create new jobs. I often asked students in many private and government schools what they wanted to do after completing their schooling. Almost 99 per cent of them replied that they would like to take up jobs. When I asked how many of them wanted to become entrepreneurs, how many of them wanted to do their own work or if they wanted to work in a way where instead of looking for jobs, they would be capable of creating more jobs, just one or two of them raised their hands in response. Be it a private school or a government school, in my experience, there are hardly four to five students among thousands who think of providing employment opportunities to others rather than finding a job for themselves.

The question is—if we only create jobseekers, where will the job providers come from? If almost every child, armed with a degree, goes looking for a job, who will provide these jobs? We often hear stories of graduates and even people with doctorates who are compelled to apply for positions that require much lower qualifications. Why does that happen? Why does the person who has spent twenty years of his/her life gaining expertise in a subject not have the confidence or ability to create opportunities if he/she can't find one? Why do our educated youngsters lack in confidence? Why have they limited their potential to just getting a job? Why can't they apply their skills in any other area? From what I see, the reason is the current education system. This existing system certainly imparts knowledge but it neither teaches how to apply that knowledge to create something new nor does it instil confidence in students. In this system, we equip our children with knowledge and qualifications but we don't give them the

ability to apply these skills independently. This ability is what I would call the ‘entrepreneurship mindset’.

The lack of ability to think out of the box in spite of earning impressive qualifications is the reason why we are a country of jobseekers. There are no jobs because our schools and colleges are only creating jobseekers and not job creators.

The issue is not just about employment, but the entire economy is at stake here. Ours is an economy of job seekers. Such an economy can never compete with the economy of job providers. In the US and many European countries, however, most schools develop an entrepreneurial mindset in their students. In my opinion, this is the reason they are able to think beyond just seeking jobs. They are also capable of creating jobs for talented people even from other countries like India. It is no wonder then that a large chunk of our graduates from IIMs and IITs look towards these countries for jobs. Who created these companies? Where did the creators of these companies graduate from? These days, the crème de la crème of our educated youth is either moving to the US, the UK or Europe in large numbers or seeking jobs in European or American companies based in India. Working for multinationals may not seem problematic on the surface but it is a huge strike on the country’s economy. That is because the profits from a product created by our people, even if used in America or Japan or India itself, go to the country where the company is from. I am not saying this from a swadeshi viewpoint. My worry is that the country’s power, infrastructure and money go into nurturing talent, but due to the lack of entrepreneurial attitude, this talent contributes to the country’s economy only by spending the money they earn or by paying taxes. The profit made through the hard work done by this talent contributes to the growth of companies and economies of the countries where the companies are based. That is my reason for saying that an economy of jobseekers can never compete with one of job creators and providers. The reason for the success of many economies in this day and age is that they are creating job providers and not job seekers in their schools and colleges.

This analysis of education systems served as a background for introducing the entrepreneurship mindset curriculum (EMC) in Delhi government schools. This curriculum has been introduced for students of classes 9 to 12 as a stepping stone to lead them to the world outside the walls of schools. In the EMC, we are

to lead them to the world outside the walls of schools. In the EMC, we are neither teaching our students how to work in offices nor are we training them for any particular job. As is evident from the name, this curriculum aims at infusing confidence in students to do new things, to do bigger things, to make decisions and work with courage; to take the fear of failure out of them and to make them pioneers in their work spheres.

Interestingly, the class was started on the request of the students. It had just been a few months since the happiness class had started in schools and the results had been better than expected. Around this time, the senior students from almost all schools put forward a request for something like the happiness class for them. On seeing the good results among the junior students, even the teachers started asking for something similar for senior students. Even I wanted to do something for the senior students but I was not in favour of extending the happiness class to senior classes because its aim was the emotional development of students, which is best done till class 8. For students of classes 9 to 12, focusing on their career was more important.

To begin with, I started having long discussions with my colleagues in the education department and started designing the EMC with them. My colleagues were of the opinion that it would be a landmark, but we didn't have enough subject specialists to create an entire curriculum. So I took the discussion outside the department to Prithvi Reddy, Neeraj Gulati and Tarak Goradia. These three are my friends—Prithvi is also an IT professional, Neeraj is a well-known entrepreneur in his own right, and Tarak has a PhD in computer science and has worked with many multinational companies. They helped me come up with a concept note first. Then, I went to Bengaluru to meet a few young professionals who had been working on entrepreneurship in detail. Prithvi and Tarak introduced me to Mekin Maheshwari who was the founder–HR head of Flipkart and is inculcating the entrepreneurship mindset through the Udayam Foundation, where he is the founder head. My colleague in the government, Abhishek Gupta, who had been working in the area of skill development and entrepreneurship for almost a decade, also became a part of the team. This is how an informal team was created. After a few discussions, the responsibility to create the curriculum was given to a team led by SCERT director Sunita Kaushik. Many renowned SCERT scholars were also put on the team. Many extraordinary teachers from Delhi schools who had stood out in the last four years, many of them from

government schools, were also included in the team.

This was a team with a huge dream. But they didn't have any prior experience or standing in the field. There weren't any examples that they could emulate. Most of the ongoing entrepreneurship courses in the country were packages for a few months where students were introduced to the qualities required to become ace entrepreneurs. The aim of this team, on the other hand, was to initiate a thought process among children and that too not through a week or two-week-long programme but a four-year-long coursework for students from classes 9 to 12. There were no examples or case studies anywhere in the world of such a curriculum for four years. The first challenge the team faced was of imbibing the entrepreneurial mindset themselves.

During the process of developing the curriculum, this team would come up with something new every day, they would create a new entrepreneurship-related inspirational story or activity, try it out in a school and try something new based on the results. The advantage was that there were enough schools and students to assess the impact of this intervention. This is why the efficacy of these ideas was put to test in different classes in twelve schools every day. The curriculum was also tested in twenty-four schools for one month. I don't think any curriculum has ever been tested on such a large scale till now. The feedback received from the pilot study helped me develop my own understanding of entrepreneurship. The coursework was started as one that helped children develop an aptitude for starting their own business. It was probably in the first or second school that a girl told me that the curriculum was of no use to her because its aim was to make her a businesswoman, but she wanted to become a scientist and work for a space agency. We got similar feedback from many other students and realized that if we continued in the same direction, students, guardians and teachers would not accept it and might, in fact, turn against it. We spotted this in the initial feedback. We mulled over it and found that our idea of the EMC was incomplete. This was especially true for government schools, where, in many cases, students hardly have academic support at home. In such homes, if we tried to turn children into entrepreneurs, they would become distrusting towards the EMC. Most parents of such students wanted their children to complete their education and get a job. We decided to focus not on honing skills but on creating an entrepreneurial attitude. The person who wants to become a scientist or a manager or a banker or wants to be a professional in

any field and progress in it also requires such a mindset. Even to become a successful IAS or IPS officer, one needs an entrepreneurial attitude from the beginning of their career. We decided that we start working on creating this temperament from classes 9 to 12 through the EMC. This curriculum should have an effect on their personality by creating an entrepreneurial viewpoint and they may decide to be entrepreneurs or professionals in the process. When we started working on the curriculum with this aim and held discussions in schools, we found that no student or teacher was against it. In fact, they said it was necessary and very important for every child.

Thus, the next challenge in front of the team designing the course was to create activities that wouldn't be difficult for students of classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 to perform with their teachers. In schools that had a shortage of classrooms, lack of playgrounds and, to a certain extent, a few teachers with fixed mindsets—we had to come up with a curriculum keeping these basic ground realities in mind because they would have an impact on its execution. The work was difficult but we were emboldened by the fact that the team developing the curriculum also had the mind for it. The team worked continuously. After about six months of gruelling work, they came up with one book for classes 9 and 10 and one for 11 and 12. I would like to mention here that no books were made for the children under the happiness class or the EMC. Rather a collection of case studies and activities were compiled for the teachers. The one-month pilot study of the curriculum under the guidance of SCERT started from 1 April 2019 and continued till 10 May 2019 in twenty-four schools. Out of these, ten schools were for girls only, eight for boys and six were co-ed. Among these, eighteen ran in morning shifts and six in evening shifts. In the pilot classes, there were 26,301 students in classes 9 to 12. Around 424 teachers were provided special training before starting the pilot project. In the pilot phase, two observers were sent to every class to observe the response of teachers and students towards the content of the curriculum and activities. Additionally, one person from the core team went to the schools on a daily basis. In the almost forty days of the pilot, observers from SCERT took feedback every week for detailed discussions on every aspect of the curriculum.

This is how feedback taken during the trial period helped in modifying the curriculum, and after summer vacations, from the first week of July, the course was started for students from classes 9 to 12 in all the 1000 schools with the

was started for students from classes 9 to 12 in all the 1000 schools with the number of students totalling up to 6 lakh. Before this, 20,000 teachers were given an orientation and training.

Just like in the happiness class, a lot of stress is laid on mindfulness in the EMC. The first five minutes of these classes are for mindfulness. In addition to this, one period every month is especially dedicated to this. Students feel tremendous change in themselves because they practise mindfulness. The first five minutes of every class calms all their inner unrest and guides their thoughts in a positive direction so they can focus better on the case studies, discussions and activities given in the EMC.

I am of the opinion that the happiness class and the EMC complement each other. In the crucial period between nursery and class 8, when students need emotional development, the happiness class helps them. When they are in classes 9 to 12 and focused on their future and careers, the EMC helps them broaden their intellectual horizons. I believe that if this mindset is developed properly for four years, then the two and a half lakh students of Delhi won't chase jobs, rather jobs will run after them. And if, of these two and a half lakh students, even 25,000–30,000 children become job providers instead of jobseekers, then the issue of paucity of jobs will be solved.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of this curriculum is to instil confidence in students and thus initiate change in the Indian economy, to strive to develop it as an economy of job creators and job providers rather than of jobseekers.

And one day we will be able to achieve this goal.

This Is Just the Beginning . . .

I consider the work we have done on education in the last five years as a foundation stone. Till now, we have worked only on making the foundation strong. The tower of education still has to be built. What also remains to be achieved is the beginning of a happy and self-confident, creative and positive society created by education. It has only been a year since the happiness class started. Work on the EMC has just started. In the education department, officers working at the district and zonal levels are on a par with principals. We tried to put an end to their wait for promotions but since it was a service matter, the request is being reviewed by the Supreme Court. There are thousands of positions vacant for principals in government schools. Vice principals have also not been promoted. Almost 5000 out of 55,000 teaching positions don't have teachers while 22,000 guest teachers are working on an ad hoc basis. Though we increased the salary of guest teachers two years ago to bring it on a par with that of permanent teachers, they neither get promotions nor do they have any job security. We have to make the position of guest teachers stable too. How can people who live with the fear of losing their job function properly with a calm mind? In my estimate, we need around 10 per cent more than the required number of teachers. This is to cover leaves and training breaks. This means that if we need 55,000 teachers, then we should have 61,500 teachers available. We can then send our teachers to institutions abroad for training for an adequate period of time. We can then grant them leaves as per their entitlement. Many a time, female teachers don't get childcare leaves because we don't have enough teachers. It is because of this reason that we have to start the tradition of increasing the number of teachers by 10 per cent.

The happiness class, which has been around for a year now, has given us many examples where we have seen a huge change in a number of children. There has been an improvement in their studies. There have been examples where teenaged rebellion towards society and especially towards parents has

where teenaged rebellion towards society and especially towards parents has given way to love and respect. We have to make sure that this programme reaches the subconscious of the children. We have to show that education not only teaches a child science or maths but also guarantees positive thoughts and good behaviour. We have to give the guarantee that when a child starts working after completing school and college, he/she will not do anything dishonest. He/she will work honestly without exploiting others.

Through the entrepreneurial mindset we have to build every child's self-confidence. We have to make sure that they have confidence in their abilities to make them think big and new and pursue it with courage; that when they start working in a job or start a business, they can march ahead without any fear or uncertainty. Through this curriculum we want to create a generation that can establish companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Sony, Samsung and Walmart in India. The day that happens, the Indian economy would be able to face the world with pride and India wouldn't be called a country of unemployed educated youths. This cannot happen just by giving them engineering or management degrees. For this, the country's mindset has to be made entrepreneurial and that is the reason for starting this course from class 9.

We also have to start a curriculum on patriotism on the lines of the happiness class and the EMC. The purpose of the happiness class is to develop a child's emotional side to make him sensitive and well-behaved. In the same way, the aim of the EMC is to make them more professional. The patriotism curriculum or the citizenship curriculum will be aimed at making the ties between children and society and also the country stronger, so that the children understand their importance. It is our plan to start this curriculum from the next semester. We have started preparing for it. Thus, the engineers, doctors, managers, lawyers, journalists, merchants, bureaucrats, soldiers, researchers, teachers and politicians who have studied the happiness, entrepreneurship and patriotism curricula in school and college will not just be skilled but well-behaved too.

These are the big steps in the conceptualization of education and it will take time to bring them to fruition. In the last four years, we have initiated many programmes that are not finalized yet or there are a few we have planned but have not been able to execute. We have to start and finalize them either this year or the next.

Of these, in my opinion, the most important programmes that will help me

achieve the improvement in education that I have envisioned are:

- Halving the current curriculum: A huge part of the learning outcome that we want to achieve from other subjects, such as literature, history and science, is being covered in the happiness class and the EMC. The way of teaching them is so exciting and interesting that children are fast gaining expertise in them. This knowledge is not being achieved by rote learning or appearing for exams. That is why teaching the same things in other subjects is a waste of the students' time. There is no need for that. So, we are analysing which topics from which subjects can be removed. I hope that because of this, the curricula of other subjects will almost be halved. We will also not waste time teaching them in the traditional way. We will have to halve the coursework in the future.
- Improving the structure of the Delhi education department: As of now, the structure of the Delhi education department is something like this: One director, a few regional directors under him/her and eleven districts under them. These districts are managed by the deputy director district. There are twenty-nine zones under them. These are managed by the deputy director zones. The schools are under them. Schools ideally have a principal and a vice-principal and there are teachers according to the number of subjects being offered and the students. Statistically speaking, there are fifty schools in one zone. We are planning in a way that there will be five or ten schools in one zone and every zone will be like a hub. The head of the zone will be a senior principal, and among the five to ten schools in that zone, a few will specialize in certain areas. For example, a few schools will specialize in science, some in arts, some in sports, some in commerce or in subjects of the humanities. A child will be able to choose a school according to his/her aptitude or interest near his/her home. The schools under an entire zone will be run like a hub to optimally utilize the facilities and talent.
- Change in the examination system: I have felt this time and again and have been raising this issue too. Classroom teaching does not focus on learning as such; instead, it highlights the pattern of often-asked questions in the last four or five years. Questions asked in previous

examinations cast a huge shadow on the way teachers teach a topic and how students learn it. It won't be wrong to say that our way of teaching is slave to the way questions were asked in previous years. There is a need to change this system, and we in Delhi are gearing up for this. To this end, we instituted a new examination improvement team, and there have been substantial change in the question papers that have been prepared by the Delhi education department in the last two years. The question papers that earlier used to test knowledge acquired through mugging up are now testing the different aspects of a child's understanding of the subject. The problem is that there is no training or tradition to be followed for this. This is an experiment and is progressing slowly. When this work is complete, I am fully confident that there will be a huge change in the scholastic environment of the classrooms.

- Instituting a new education board in Delhi: This is an irony, but I see it as a blessing that there is no education board in Delhi. We are preparing to give Delhi its own education board. We thought about this in 2015 itself and even started working towards it. However, when we saw the condition of the buildings and got a sense of the scholastic environment in the classes, we realized that before introducing a new board, we had to first work on improving the infrastructure. So, we had to put this work on the backburner for a bit, but I feel it is now time to create a Delhi education board. Under this, we will create a curriculum keeping in mind a child's situation and not dump subjects and syllabi based on some idealistic philosophy. We have done the groundwork. In my opinion, Delhi should not be given a new board just because it doesn't have one. Instead, it should be a board that will throw up new ways of teaching and learning and an innovative curriculum. The examination system and curriculum should be practical. For example, as of now, if a class 12 student wants to appear for the IIT entrance exam, there is no scope for preparing for it through the Central Board's science or maths coursework. It clearly means that the kind of expertise required in these subjects to enter institutions such as the IITs have not been included in the coursework of the Central Board. The truth is that for students preparing for IITs and NEET, the syllabus of the Central Board is only

about 10 per cent helpful. The remaining is for the students to navigate. Is this not proof of the fact that our Central Board is running away from the responsibility of preparing our class 12 students for entrance exams? Why can't our school boards fill the gap that coaching institutions are? Why is there such a huge difference in the preparation for boards and entrance exams? There can be different models for different students, but if a child has to go to a coaching centre to clear entrance exams, then what is the point of conducting board exams? Why take so much of a student's time in preparing for board exams? The kind of board we are working on will help students reach the level required to clear entrance exams such as IIT, NEET and CAT. This board has adopted the same perspective for music, sports, chartered accountancy, management, etc.

- Establishing a teacher training university: In this day and age, there is no institution that can train teachers every five to seven years once they get their B.Ed degrees or clear the CTET. They need this training. The Delhi government will establish a university where new teachers will be created and current teachers will be trained at an international level. In my opinion, this will be the biggest reform in the training of teachers.
- Establishing an applied sciences university: The Delhi government will establish an applied sciences university where vocational education will be given importance. Currently, there are no clear programmes for the students who choose vocational studies in classes 11 and 12. This university will prioritize admissions of these students and will give them an opportunity to become graduates or post-graduates in their subjects. An advantage will be that subjects that are usually not seen in a favourable light, because you cannot do graduation or post-graduation in them, will become the first choice of students.
- Establishing sports universities: We will create a sports university on the lines of the university of applied sciences. Here, we will enable students interested in sports to become graduates and post-graduates in other subjects on a basic minimum level and also help them get graduation and post-graduation degrees in sports-related subjects. We have seen that students who excel in sports usually move away from studies after school. Many of them are not able to shine in sports. They only get those

> jobs where the basic requirement is passing class 12. A rising sportsperson had once asked me, ‘I put in more effort and time in sports than a student of geography or science puts in after school but your system gives him a graduation degree after three to four years but the medals and certificates I get don’t get me a graduation degree. This is in spite of the fact that the achievements of a sportsperson bring pride to his/her city and country. But if I have to progress as a sportsperson, I get jobs that are for those who have just cleared class 12. How is this my fault?’ It was this question that made me think of starting a sports university. In the coming years, people will be able to get degrees while playing the sport of their choice. Their degrees will not be based on classroom teaching but on the basis of their performance at state, national and international levels.

Good infrastructure, good classrooms, neat and clean buildings, labs, libraries—all these projects need to progress with more speed. There are more than 4 million children in Delhi who study in Delhi government or Delhi Nagar Nigam or private schools. Of these, a few even study in unrecognized schools meaning private schools that have not been approved by the Delhi government or Delhi Nagar Nigam. The Delhi government needs to aim at equipping all government schools so that the more than 4 million children in Delhi opt for them. Then, even if a child decides to study in a private school or takes some other decision, Delhi schools should have the facilities to give all the children in Delhi a quality education.

These are some preparations and dreams for education. These preparations and dreams will throw up more needs and dreams. From them will emerge a good society, country and people. It is this hope that keeps me going. I hope that, one day, education will become an important point of debate in the political discourse of our country. That day, we won’t have to struggle but thrive.

The state of a classroom in Shaheed Hemu Kalani Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya, Lajpat Nagar, in 2015

The state of the same classroom in Shaheed Hemu Kalani Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya, Lajpat Nagar, in 2018

When Manish Sisodia talks to principals and teachers, they tell him how the happiness class has changed the behaviour of students in just one year

Through mindfulness, children learn to focus on the goings-on in their bodies and the thoughts in their minds

On 2 July 2018, His Holiness the Dalai Lama (centre) launched Delhi government's happiness class along with Arvind Kejriwal (right) and Manish Sisodia at the Thyagaraj Stadium

Activities are also an integral part of the happiness class. The aim is to help children analyse, understand and evaluate their thought processes.

In 2017–18, twenty-three District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) and State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) faculty members, eleven Directorate of Education officials and 165 mentor–teachers visited National Institute of Education, Singapore, to attend the mentoring and coaching course

State-of-the-art swimming pools in Annie Besant Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Mayur Vihar-Phase II, for active bodies and sound minds. Swimming pools were made in schools for the first time by the Aam Aadmi Party government.

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